

IMPERIALISM

INTRODUCTION

Various scholars have attempted to explain imperialism from various perspectives but also differentiate it from terms like colonialism. The stress is also on the ways in which imperialism adopted different forms at different historical junctures. The Unit begins by looking at some of the definitions of imperialism. It will then go into the theories of imperialism and examine different explanations of imperialism that have been offered by scholars over the last century. The Unit will also focus on the stages of imperialism and see how these stages correspond with the rise and expansion of capitalism. It will finally take up Great Britain as a case study of the largest imperial power of the 19th and the 20th centuries. Imperialism and colonialism have been two very popular foreign policy terms in the dictionary of international relations. To the people, who have been in the past victims of imperialism or colonialism, both these systems are identical in so far both involve foreign rule, economic exploitation of their land and resources and culture subordination to the aliens. In the theory of international relations, the system of imperialism and colonialism are intimately related but are different system. There was a time when Imperialism And colonialism were regarded legal and moral Instruments for fulfilling the goals of national Interest and for helping the development of backward nations, But today these are retarded as Instrument of war, oppression, exploitation, expansionism, misery hatred, degradation and hence immoral and illegal instrument.

Meaning of imperialism: - Imperialism refers to the policy of using a country's influence and power to acquire colonies outside of its own borders. This can be done through political manipulation or through military means. Imperialism leads to the exploitation of the colony for the betterment of the imperial power. Typical motives of imperial powers can be economic, military, religious, or ethnocentric. Sometimes this involves the settlement of vast numbers of colonizers in the colonized land.

Imperialism is simply a process in which some countries dominate other countries. They take those countries (sometimes, but not always, actually conquering them and ruling over them) and impose an unequal relationship on them. In this relationship, the periphery (the dominated country) is made to serve the core (the imperial power).

Imperialism is a policy of extending control of authority over foreign entities as a means of acquisition and/or maintenance of empires. This is either through direct territorial conquest or settlement, or through indirect methods of exerting control on the politics and/or economy of other countries. The term is often used to describe the policy of a nation's dominance over distant land, regardless of whether the nation considers itself part of the empire. The age of imperialism usually refers to the New Imperialism period starting from 1860, when major European states started colonizing the other continents. The term imperialism was initiated coined in the mid to late 1800s to reflect the policies of countries such Britain and France expansion into Africa, and the America. In Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin argued that capitalism necessarily induced imperialism in order to find new markets and resources. This theory of necessary expansion of capitalism outside the boundaries of nation-state was also shared by Rosa Luxemburg and then by liberal philosopher Hannah Aredt.



Since then, however, 'Imperialism' has been extended by Marxist scholars to be a synonym of capitalistic international trade and banking. Insofar as 'imperialism' in the non-Marxist sense might be used to refer to an intellectual position, it would imply the belief that the acquisition and maintenance of empires is a positive good, probably combined with an assumption of cultural or other such superiority inherent to imperial power. Imperialism draws heavy criticism on the grounds that historically it has been frequently employed for economic exploitation in which the imperialist power makes use of other countries as sources of raw materials and cheap labour, shaping their economies to suit its own interests, and keeping their people in poverty. When imperialism is accompanied by overt military conquest, it is also seen as a violation of freedom and human rights. In recent years, there has also been a trend to criticize imperialism not at an economic or political level, but at a simply cultural level, particularly the widespread global influence of American culture. Some dispute this extension, however, on the grounds that it is highly subjective (to differentiate between mutual interaction and undue influence) and also applied selectively (hamburgers being imperialist as they kill people, cause obesity and the cultivation of their main ingredient 'beef' causes widespread and irreversible ecological damage. In stark contrast, black tea as a completely sustainable crop with significant health benefits does not).

Etymology meaning of imperialism: - The Latin root is imperium (command or supreme power). The original meaning of imperialist was "an adherent of an emperor" Its current meaning dates from the late 19th century in relation to the actions of the British Empire; it subsequently grew to apply to any historical or contemporary instance of a greater power acting, or perceived to be acting, at the expense of a lesser power. Imperialism is 'therefore not only used to describe bone fide empire-building policies, such as those of the Roman, the Spanish or the British, but it is also used controversially and/or disparagingly, for example by both sides in communist and anti-communist propaganda, or to describe actions of the United States since the American Presidency's acquisition of overseas territory during the Spanish American War, to its present-day position as the world's only superpower.

Imperialism and Colonialism have been two very popular terms in the dictionary of International Politics. Up to 1945 foreign policy of imperialism/colonialism was projected, used and defended by almost every European state for justifying its rule over the people of several colonies and dependent states.

"There was a time when imperialism and colonialism were regarded as legal and moral instruments of fulfilling the goals of national interests of powerful nations."

"Imperialism is something more organised, more militant, more self-consciously aggressive and bent on objectives, above and beyond those of colonialism" —E.M. Winslow.

These were described as "policies for helping the development of backward nations." These were also projected as good and ideal principles. But in reality these acted as instruments of war, oppression, exploitation, expansionism, misery, hatred, and degradation. These were used to impose and justify authoritarian and unjust alien rule over native people.

The term 'imperialism' is often used in a very broad, vague and arbitrary way, which makes the task of defining it very difficult. Almost all nations use it for criticizing the policies and actions of



their opponents. The USA used to criticize the erstwhile USSR as an imperial power attempting to control other nations under the cloak of communism.

The USSR used to criticize the USA as an imperialist country working for expanding capitalistic imperialism over other countries. China was always critical of both the USA as a bourgeoisie-capitalist- imperialist country and the USSR as a social imperialist. Pakistan always criticizes India as a country having an imperialist design in South-Asia and India regards China as a country pursuing expansionism and imperialism in Asia.

Raymond Buell observes: "Every unjustifiable demand made by one government upon another, every aggressive war, is called imperialistic. Imperialism is a word which covers many a sin. It means different things to different people."

Definitions of Imperialism:

- 1) "Imperialism is the employment of the engines of government diplomacy to acquire territories, protectorates, and/or spheres of influence occupied usually by other races or peoples, and to promote industrial, trade, and investment opportunities."—**Charles A. Beard**
- 2) "Imperialism has been domination of Non-European native races by totally dissimilar European nations." —**Parker T. Moon**
- 3) "Imperialism is something more organised, more militant, more self-consciously aggressive and bent on objectives, above and beyond those of colonialism." —**E.M. Winslow**
- 4) "Imperialism is the imposition by force and violence of alien rule upon subject people." —**Prof. Schuman**
- 5) "Imperialism is a policy which aims at creating, organizing, maintaining an empire; that is, a state of vast size composed of various more or less distinct national subjects to a single centralized will." —**Moritz Julius Bonn**
- 6) "Imperialism is the name of a common law and order system for different nations and races." —C.D. Berns
- 7) "Imperialism constitutes the attempt to conquer other countries." —**N.L. Bukharin**

Features / Characteristics of Imperialism:

- (1) Imperialism is a highly subjective term; the writers define it pretty as much as they please.
- (2) Imperialism has become more of an epithet than anything else. The communists use it to stigmatize the policies of the western states and the western powers use it to criticize and reject communist policies.
- (3) There are four common points in various definitions of Imperialism:



- a) Imperialism may or may not have non-economic motivations;
 - b) It may pertain to a very limited operation—a “vast empire” need not be contemplated at all;
 - c) It need not involve a difference of race—“there may very well be imperialism within a single race”; and
 - d) It may be planned or unplanned.
4. Imperialism may or may not involve a high regard for the welfare of the inhabitants of imperialized colonies. It may be developmental or exploitative. (In reality it is always exploitive)
 5. It may be economically profitable for the imperialist country, or it may be decidedly unprofitable. In practice it always act as a system of economic exploitation of the dependent people.
 6. Imperialism involves imposition of the power of imperialist state over other peoples and their lands/states.

Summing up their views on imperialism, Palmer and Perkins define it as: “A relationship in which one area and its people are subordinate to another area and its government....Imperialism in essence always involves subordination; it is a power relationship without moral implications of any kind.”

In simple words, we can say that imperialism is a policy of subjugating other countries for the purposes of territorial expansionism, expansion of political power, exploitation of economic resources and for establishing cultural domination over the people of imperialized countries.

Meaning of Colonialism

In its content, Colonialism is quite similar to Imperialism. Both involve the imposition of an alien rule and domination of the native people. However, colonialism is definitely more subtle than imperialism. It involves a deeper and more extensive penetration in the life of the people of colonies. It involves social, economic, political and cultural control of the people of the colonial power over the weak and less developed people of the colonies. Colonialism involves a very deep socio-economic exploitive penetration of a developed civilization in to the life of a weaker and under-developed society.

Definitions:

1. “Colonialism is the occupation of virgin territories in which conflict was incidental, or even unnecessary, and subordinate to the desire of Europeans to find a new place to live.” —**E.M. Winslow**
2. “Colonialism is a natural overflow of nationality; its test is the power of the colonialists to transplant the civilization they represent to the new natural and social environment in which they find themselves.” —**J.A. Hobson**

In simple words, we can say that colonialism is a system of exploitation of native and



underdeveloped people by the people of a powerful and developed civilization.

Features of Colonialism:

- (i) Colonialism is a system of domination by an alien minority by asserting racial and cultural superiority over a materially inferior native majority.
- (ii) It involves a system of contact between a machine oriented, better developed, economically powerful civilization with a backward, under-developed and poor civilization.
- (iii) The imposition of rule of the superior and better developed civilization over the weaker and poor civilization.

Difference between Imperialism and Colonialism System: -To the people who have been the victims of Imperialism or Colonialism, both these systems are identical in so far both involve foreign rule, economic exploitation of their land and resources, and cultural subordination to the aliens. In the theory of international politics, the systems of imperialism and colonialism are intimately related but are held to be somewhat different.

Main Points of Difference:

- a. Imperialism is basically a system of political control—foreign rule over other territories or countries. Colonialism on the other hand involves a domination of the life and culture of the colonized people by the people of the colonialist state and an advanced civilization.
- b. Since imperialism involves the imposition of alien rule over other people, it necessarily involves the use of military power and war. As against this, Colonialism does not necessarily involve the use of military power as it can be effected by the natural flow of a developed nationality to virgin territories and areas inhabited by backward people.
- c. As a system of control, colonialism is more subtle and less formal than Imperialism. Imperialism is more rigid and autocratic in approach.

The following motives/gains usually provide strong motivation to the policy of imperialism:

(1) Economic Gains: - One of the primary objectives of Imperialism colonialism is to secure economic gains by utilising and exploiting, the raw material potential of the subject nations. The search for markets for getting vital raw materials, the need to find markets for selling the goods, and the quest for new areas of investment of surplus capital, together provide a strong motive for the pursuance of an imperialist policy. In the words of Dr. Heinrich Schnee, "Great industrial nations need colonies to supply them with raw materials. "Similarly, the possession of colonies, dependencies and territories always affords a big opportunity to the imperial power to sell its surplus goods. The markets of the colonies, because of chronic backwardness, constitute big consumer markets and hence attract the imperial powers. Further, an empire helps a powerful and rich nation to invest its surplus capital in the colonies. At home the opportunities are always limited and very often domestic investment reaches a saturation point beyond which investment becomes unprofitable. As against this investments abroad, particularly in colonies, offers big opportunities for highly profitable investments. This factor provides a strong motivation to



imperialism.

(2) **Power and Prestige**:- To be more and more powerful and thus secure prestige in international relations has been a psychological motive behind the policy of imperialism in international relations. The lust for adventure, power, prestige and glory which results from a vast colonial empire provides a strong motivation to the policy of imperialism. Moreover the feeling of pride and superiority which comes to develop even in the lowest of the white races in their dealings with the 'backward races' provides a powerful psychological motive to imperialism. The colonial possession is always considered as an addition to the national prestige of the imperial state.

(3) **White Man's Burden or Humanitarian Motive**:- The supporters of imperialism advocate that it is motivated by the humanitarian motive of uplifting the poor and backward people—the non-white people. It is projected, as R. Kipling observes, "the Whiteman's burden to help the development of others." Such a notion is based on the view that the white race is a superior race and it is its prime duty to uplift the inferior races. Supporters of such a motive of imperialism advocate the view that imperialism helps the people of colonies in abolishing ignorance, slavery and cannibalism.

(4) **Psychological Satisfaction—Nationalism**:- Nationalism is one of the fundamental motives of Imperialism and Colonialism. As Hans Kohn observes, "Imperialism is for the most part a later phase in the process began by nationalism. Nationalism strives to unite the members of the nation, politically and territorially, in a state organisation. When that is accomplished, the struggle for the possession of the earth proceeds further.... Thus imperialism and nationalism are interlocked." In fact aggressive nationalism always leads to imperialism and war.

(5) **Securing of National Defence**:- The control over the men and material resources of the imperial possessions considerably strengthens the ability of the imperial power to defend itself in wars with other states. In the two World Wars, Britain depended very heavily upon India and other colonies for the supply of soldiers and vital resources for the defence of the British empire.

In the 19th century, Britain used Afghanistan, Iran and Tibet as buffer states for the defence of India against Russia. During First World War, France drew nearly 5, 00,000 troops and 2, 00,000 workers from her colonies. In both the World Wars Britain's success was largely due to its ability to exploit the man power and other resources of its colonies.

(6) **Adjustment of Surplus Population**:- One of the important motives of imperialism is to adjust surplus population in overseas colonies and territories. In the past, many nations justified their policy of colonial acquisitions on the basis of necessity of adjusting their surplus populations. Mussolini's Fascism openly advocated "Italy's surplus manpower must emigrate." Thus, the need to send surplus population abroad has been one of the motives of imperialism.

Besides these six primary motives of imperialism, the desire to spread a particular religion in other parts of the globe, the need for maintaining a particular balance of power, the desire to spread a particular ideology and the desire to export ideological revolutions to other countries, have also been the motives of imperialism.

Three Methods of Imperialism by Morgenthau:



The policy of imperialism involves the attempt to overthrow the status quo, that is, the reversal of the power relations between the imperialist nation and its prospective victims. For achieving this, the imperialist nation can adopt three alternative means:

1. **Military Imperialism:-** The first and the most crude method, which was employed by most of the conquerors of all times, has been military imperialism. In the words of Morgenthau, "The most obvious the most ancient and also the crudest form of imperialism is military conquest. The big conquerors of all times have also been the great imperialists."

Military imperialism seeks conquest by means of direct military attack. Conquerors, like Hitler; Napoleon, Louis XIV, Mussolini and many others, used this method of military conquest on the ground that it enabled them to achieve their goal very quickly. But as a matter of fact, this method is most dangerous because war is a gamble and nothing can be said about its results.

Very often military imperialism secures negative and opposed results. A nation seeking to secure imperialism through military conquest very often itself gets imperialized by other states. Nazi Germany waged war to achieve its imperialistic goals but in the process it lost its power and even became a victim of other imperialist powers.

2. **Economic Imperialism:-** To use superior economic power for pursuing imperialism over weak and poor states is considered to be the most rational method of imperialism. The common characteristics of a policy of economic imperialism is to exercise economic control over other nations. Through economic means, the imperial power establishes increases and exercises control over the finances and policies of other nations.

The Central American Republics, for instance, are all sovereign states, but to a very large extent, their economic life is dependent upon exports to the United States. This situation makes it virtually impossible for them to pursue for, any length of time, policies of any kind, domestic or foreign, to which the United States would object. British imperialism over India began by economic means.

'Oil diplomacy' is also a variety of economic imperialism. Through foreign investment, economic aid, loans, multinational corporations, trade and technology-monopolies and other such means, the rich and powerful nations of the world enforce economic imperialism over the poor countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America—The real aim of the economic aid and loans that the developed nations give to the under-developed nations, is to control their economies and consequently their policies, domestic as well as foreign.

The under-developed states are politically independent as well as legally full sovereign states but economically these continue to be dependent upon the rich and developed states, most of which happen to be traditional imperial powers. This situation of political independence coupled with economic dependence has come to be known as Neo-colonialism or Neo- imperialism.

3. **Cultural Imperialism:-** While military imperialism seeks to reverse the power relations through military conquest and economic imperialism seeks to achieve it through economic control, cultural imperialism seeks to change the status quo and reverse the power relations through control over the minds of men. It aims at the control of other nations by impressing upon them the superiority of the culture, ideology and way of life of the imperial power.



Cultural imperialism is a subtle means, a psychological method of expanding state power by impressing upon others, through persuasion and propaganda, the superior nature of the culture and ideology of the imperial power.

This method of imperialism does not involve the use of either military power or economic pressure but at the same-time it is very effective and enduringly successful in achieving the goal of imperialism. In the words of Morgenthau, "Cultural imperialism is the most subtle and, if it were to succeed by itself alone, the most successful of imperialist policies."

American policy of impressing upon other nations the value of freedom, free enterprise and liberal democracy is in fact a subtle method of influencing other nations in favour of the US power in international relations.

Arguments in favour of Imperialism:

1. Natural Process: - Many supporters of imperialism justify it as a natural policies based upon the natural laws of social evolution as "Struggle for existence," "Survival of the fittest" and "Will to survive and dominate." On the basis of these laws every imperial power asserts its inherent right to be more and more powerful and to dominate the weaker. Fascist dictator Mussolini justified his policy of war and imperialism on the basis of these principles.
2. Sociological Justification: - It has been argued in favour of imperialism that each nation has the duty to satisfy the needs and interests of its population. The ever increasing population makes it essential for the state to seek new territories for securing essential resources, raw-materials and markets for promoting the well-being of its people.
3. Economic Justification: - Imperialism is further justified by its supporters on economic grounds. It is regarded as a valuable means for channelizing the surplus goods as well as for securing raw-materials and markets abroad. Imperialism is defended as an ideal means for the uplift of the economically backward people. It involves the concept of economic cooperation between the developed and the backward peoples. Imperialism makes it possible for the people of colonies to enjoy the benefits of industrial and technological advancements through their association with the imperial power.
4. Religious Justification: - A racist argument in favour of imperialism has been that it is the responsibility of the 'White Man', being superior and better developed man, to help the people of other races to develop. It is indeed, argue the supporters of Imperialism, a moral obligation of the White race—"the Europeans' to undertake the task of uplifting the backward and inferior people. It is further observed by many pro- imperialism theorists that in colonizing and imperializing Africa, Asia and other parts of the world, the Europeans were in fact discharging their moral obligation. It was a duty of the non-white races to accept the 'big-brotherly care' and 'benevolent rule' of the White Man. To spread their religion to the different parts of the empire is a religious duty of the imperial power.
5. Administrative Justification: - Another argument in defence of imperialism has been that it acts as an instrument of political unity of the colonies. Imperialism helps the political consolidation and awakening of the people of colonies. It is asserted that only in the company of highly civilized and politically developed people of the imperial power that the people of the



colonies can become politically conscious of their rights and duties. Imperialism as such is designed to prepare the people of the colonies for becoming self-confident and self-dependent. It is a system of providing vitally important training in administration and rule to the backward people of the colonies.

6. *Peace Argument is favour of Imperialism*: - Finally, the supporter of imperialism justifies it as an instrument of internationalism, peace and universal brotherhood. Living as parts of an empire, the people of different colonies develop a sense of unity and partnership. It inculcates among them a spirit of internationalism and brotherhood. Imperialism strengthens peace by making people rise above narrow nationalism and parochialism. In the words C.D. Berns, "Imperialism breaks down the narrowness of village politics and leads to internationalism and brotherhood."

Arguments against Imperialism:

1. *Imperialism is Inhuman*: - Imperialism is anti-human because it justifies unnatural and discriminatory inequalities between man and man. It wrongly assumes the superiority of the white race and inferiority of all other races. It gives little respect to the rights and freedoms of the dependent people. In the name of such principles like White Man's Burden, it seeks to violate human rights and freedoms of the people of colonies.

2. *Imperialism is Anti-liberal*: - Imperialism is anti-liberal since it justifies subordination of native people to their imperial masters. It's so called objective—the upliftment and welfare of the people of the colonies—is a smoke screen and cloak aimed at concealing the selfish, autocratic and authoritarian policies of the imperialists.

3. *Imperialism is Anti-democratic*: - Imperialism is anti-democratic since its basis is inequality between the imperializing people and the victims of imperialism. It is a sham which pretends to nourish self-government and democracy for the colonies, but it really involves authoritarianism of the worst kind.

4. *Imperialism is a System of Exploitation, Loot and Plunder*: - Imperialism is a system of organised exploitation of the colonies. It never works for helping the population of the colonies to develop. Instead it always helps the imperial masters to gain at the cost of their subjects. Under imperialism, no attempt is made to develop the resources and industrial potential of the colonies. The imperial power is interested only in exploiting the resources of its colonies for its own benefits. The resources of India were fully exploited by the Britishers for their selfish interests. Imperialism always seeks to vulgarize and exploit the native culture for serving its selfish interests. Ethnic pluralism of India was exploited by the British rulers to keep their empire intact. Divide and rule was practiced in the name of protection of minorities.

In fact, imperialism creates unnatural inequalities, and by following divide and rule, it attempts to fragmentize the nation into small 'nations' and consequently to perpetuate its control over them. Imperialism is, as such, an inherently evil system in its nature and scope. It is a curse and has nothing good or benevolent in it. History supports this observation. The European imperialists openly and nakedly exploited the people, resources and wealth of Asian and African countries and did practically nothing for their welfare.



Fortunately, in the 20th century, the forces of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism as well as national liberation movements were successful in getting liquidated imperialism and colonialism from international relations. The world witnessed the welcome birth of a large number of sovereign independent states in all parts of the World. Rise of Asia, Africa and Latin America took place and it gave a new look and orientation to international relations. However, such a positive development was followed by the emergence of new imperialism and neo-colonialism in international relations.

Development of the concept of imperialism

There is no one standard definition of imperialism. Let us look at some often used ones. Imperialism refers to the process of capitalist development which leads the capitalist countries to conquer and dominate pre-capitalist countries of the world. Imperialism is the system of political control exercised by the metropolis over the domestic and foreign policy and over the domestic politics of another polity, which we shall call the periphery (countries at the margins of the economic hierarchy). The term imperialism is used to designate the international practices and relations of the capitalist world during the distinct stage of mature capitalism that begins in the last quarter of the 19th century. All these definitions, their differences notwithstanding, firmly establish imperialism as a modern phenomenon and distinctly different from pre-modern forms of conquests and political domination. In this context four important characteristic features of imperialism are:

1. Sharp increase in international flow of commodities, men and capital,
2. interdependent set of relations between countries at different levels of industrial development, • advanced and superior technology in imperialist countries,
3. competition between advanced capitalist countries

MODES OF IMPERIALISM

Imperialism can be both formal and informal. Formal imperialism involves annexation and direct rule while informal empire means indirect rule by local elites who are independent legally but politically dependent on the metropolis. Similarly, there are three broad types of empires which have either existed in a linear chronology, one succeeding the other, or also co-existed with each other at a particular historical juncture. These types are:

- i. trading empires which took the initiative in early conquests but eventually lost out in the era of industrial capitalism, such as Portugal and Spain
- ii. industrial empires with full-fledged colonies, such as Britain and France
- iii. Industrial empires without, or with few, formal colonies, such as Germany.

