



## Frames in Unit 8

This period of history is usually viewed through the lens of two different struggles: the Cold War and decolonization. But if we look at both of these using our course frames then we begin to see how these struggles were intertwined. As new communities or nation-states were formed through decolonization movements, the Soviet Union and the US sought to establish networks that would extend their ideologies and influence.



**00:01**

*Bob Bain, PhD, University  
of Michigan*

*Black and white photo  
of a protest against  
colonization*

Two global struggles dominated the mid-20th century, both stretching from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to around 1990. One struggle was the clash between two alliances—one led by the United States and the other by the Soviet Union—in what is known as the Cold War. The other struggle was a conflict between the remaining global empires and their colonized people, who were fighting for independence. This is known as decolonization. These two struggles are often studied separately. But the Cold War and decolonization are best understood together, as we can see when we view them through the frames.

**00:47**

*United States:  
Free-market capitalism*

*Soviet Union:  
State-planned socialism*

The United States and Russia were the two principal victors of the Second World War. From one perspective, the Cold War was just a confrontation between these two powerful states—clash of communities. But the United States and the Soviet Union also had two very different systems of production and distribution. The economy promoted by the United States was capitalist. It relied on a free market, with relatively little government oversight. People could exchange goods and services. By contrast, the Soviet Union represented a centralized, communist economy, in which the government played a very big role.

**01:24**

*Map shows colonialism in  
1945 – much of the globe  
is still colonized at this  
point*

Capitalism and communism each had their own strengths and weaknesses. But they also each had similar needs. And one of those needs was for raw materials. Many of those raw materials could be found in the colonies of the world's big empires. That's one reason the Cold War and colonialism became entangled.

The battle for colonies' raw materials played a role in the struggles to end colonial rule. But decolonization was mainly a conflict over the shape of those communities that were colonies. People fighting for independence in Africa, Asia, and across the Pacific and the Caribbean wanted what others had fought for before: They wanted an independent nation-state of their own.

**02:08**

*A newspaper article  
with the headline "India  
Independent: British Rule  
Ends"*

*A map shows the globe in  
nation-states, showing all  
of the independent flags*

Ironically, in fighting against the British, the French, and other Western empires, the independence fighters adopted and used many ideas about sovereignty and legitimacy that the British, the French, and other empires practiced at home, but had never extended to their colonies.

So decolonization movements used many tools of their oppressors to win their freedom, although they also developed new ideas of their own. The people fighting for their independence were, in many ways, seeking equality in the world of nation-states. They were each striving to possess a nation among nations.

**02:45**

*Photographs: leaders  
of the Soviet Union and  
United States among  
soldiers and shaking hands  
with allies*

*Photos of plaques with  
the names of independent  
nation-states on them*

However, the Cold War superpowers of the Soviet Union and the United States saw these decolonization and independence battles as opportunities in their struggles against each other. They sought to further their own interests by enlisting these states or independence movements to join either the communist or capitalist side. The leaders of the anti-colonial movements in each colony would have had little chance fighting against their imperial rulers alone. They found support, not only from the superpowers, but also from each other. They built new, anti-colonial networks of supporters. They found ways to help each other morally, financially, or even by hiding guerrilla armies for each other. As one colony became independent, it tended to help others around it or even far away.

*A leader of the United Arab Republic filmed by television cameras*

**03:47**

*Photo of an army checkpoint – a sign states “You are leaving the American sector” in English, Russian, and French*

The leaders of these movements also used new technologies, like television, to appeal for support in the Soviet Union and the United States, and even to influence public opinion in the countries that ruled them.

These huge interlinked conflicts, the Cold War and decolonization, continued over a half-century. Both conflicts would largely resolve by the 1990s. The colonies in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and elsewhere almost all achieved political independence. The Soviet Union and its centralized economic system collapsed, along with communism almost everywhere, leaving the United States and the capitalist system of production and distribution triumphant.

But this was not the end of either story. New issues of community, networks, and production and distribution emerged from behind the scenes even as these two great struggles played out. You'll take up those issues in the next unit.