

Stop Waiting for the Great White Hope

Everywhere the colonial project reached — South Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, the Caribbean, the Pacific — the pattern is the same. The architects of ruin cannot be the brokers of repair.

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SOUTH ASIA · AFRICA · LATIN AMERICA · THE CARIBBEAN · THE MIDDLE EAST · THE PACIFIC · EVERYWHERE

Draw a map of every place on earth where poverty is structural, where democratic institutions are fragile, where resources are abundant but populations are poor, where borders were drawn by strangers and wars were seeded by outsiders. You will have drawn, almost perfectly, a map of everywhere the colonial project touched. That is not coincidence. That is consequence. And yet — with stunning regularity — we still turn to the powers that made that map and ask them to redraw it for us.

This article is about that habit. Where it comes from, what it costs us, and why the evidence — gathered now across every continent, across more than a century of so-called independence — makes one thing absolutely clear: white Western power has never been, and cannot structurally be, an honest broker in the affairs of the people it dispossessed. Not because every individual within those systems is malicious, but because the system itself was built to serve them, not us. That has not changed. And it will not change by asking them nicely.

The Same Story, Every Continent

Let us go around the world. Not quickly — because speed is how these stories get flattened into statistics and forgotten — but with enough care to feel the weight of the pattern. Because it is in the repetition, across cultures and languages and centuries, that the truth becomes undeniable.

AFRICA

The continent that possesses more natural resources than any other on earth — cobalt, coltan, gold, diamonds, oil, fertile land, rare earth minerals essential to every piece of modern technology — is also the continent where the majority of the world's poorest people live. This is not a paradox. It is a system working exactly as designed. European powers divided Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884 without the presence of a single African representative. They drew borders through ethnic groups, kingdoms, and trade routes, creating nation-states that served extraction, not community. They installed rulers who served colonial interests and removed those who did not. They educated an African elite in European languages and European values and sent them back to govern in the colonial image. When formal independence came — largely in the 1950s and 1960s — it came with debt, with structural dependency, with continued extraction through multinational corporations that remain, to this day, majority-owned in the West. The Congo, one of the most resource-rich places on earth, was first destroyed by King Leopold of Belgium's regime — one of the most documented atrocities of the colonial era — and has been kept in instability ever since because instability is profitable for those who buy its minerals cheaply. The West did not leave Africa. It changed its uniform.

LATIN AMERICA

The Spanish and Portuguese arrived in the Americas in the late fifteenth century and proceeded, within decades, to collapse civilisations that had existed for thousands of years. The Aztec, Inca, Maya — sophisticated, complex societies with advanced agriculture, architecture, astronomy, and governance — were destroyed not only by military force but by disease deliberately or negligently spread, by enslavement, by the systematic dismantling of indigenous knowledge and authority. The silver of Potosí, the sugar of Brazil, the gold of the Andes: all of it flowed to Europe and built the capital that funded the Industrial Revolution. Latin America achieved formal independence from Spain and Portugal in the nineteenth century, but what followed was not freedom — it was the replacement of Iberian colonialism with a new kind of dominance, this time centred in the United States. The Monroe Doctrine effectively declared the entire Western Hemisphere an American sphere of influence. The CIA orchestrated the overthrow of democratically elected governments — in Guatemala in 1953, in Chile in 1973, in countless other interventions documented and still partially classified — whenever those governments threatened American corporate interests. In Chile, Salvador Allende was killed and Augusto Pinochet installed. Thousands were tortured and disappeared. The United States called it stability. The people of Chile called it what it was. Today, Latin American nations remain caught between domestic elites who are the inheritors of colonial land structures, and external pressures from Washington and the IMF that constrain genuine economic sovereignty. The Great White Hope has had its hands in Latin American affairs for two hundred years. The region is not healed. It is still bleeding.

THE CARIBBEAN

Haiti declared independence in 1804 — the first and only successful slave revolution in history, a moment of such profound moral and political significance that it should be celebrated everywhere human freedom is valued. France's response was to demand reparations. Haiti was forced to pay France the equivalent, in today's money, of tens of billions of dollars in compensation — for the loss of its enslaved people as property. Haiti paid this debt for over a century, well into the twentieth century. It has never fully recovered. The United States occupied Haiti militarily from 1915 to 1934. It has intervened repeatedly since. Today Haiti is held up as an example of a failed state, a warning, a place requiring international management — never as what it actually is: a nation punished relentlessly for two centuries for the crime of winning its freedom. The Caribbean more broadly — Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana, the Windward Islands — was the engine room of British wealth. The sugar plantations, worked by enslaved Africans, generated profits that built country houses in England, capitalised banks, and funded the beginnings of industrial Britain. When slavery was abolished in 1833, compensation was paid — to the slave owners, not to the enslaved. Some of those compensation payments were made through government bonds that British taxpayers were still paying off in 2015. The people who were enslaved received nothing. Their descendants are still waiting.

THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 — a secret deal between Britain and France, without consultation with the peoples of the region — carved up the Ottoman Empire's Arab territories between the two European powers. The borders drawn produced Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan: states that cut across tribal, ethnic, and religious communities with the same reckless convenience as Radcliffe's partition of India. Britain promised the Arabs independence in exchange for their help defeating the Ottomans. It then promised the Zionist movement a homeland in Palestine. It could not deliver both, and it knew it could not deliver both. What followed from those broken promises — the dispossession of the Palestinian people, the conflicts that have never stopped, the interventions in Iraq, in Libya, in Syria, in Yemen — is a hundred years of consequence flowing directly from decisions made in European offices by men who saw the Middle East as territory to be managed, never as people to be respected. The oil that was discovered across the region in the twentieth century ensured that Western interest never waned — only the language changed, from empire to security, from colonialism to counterterrorism. The Great White Hope has been intervening in the Middle East for over a century. It is not more peaceful. It is demonstrably less so.

THE PACIFIC & INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States were not discovered. They were invaded. The indigenous peoples of these lands — Aboriginal Australians, Māori, First Nations, Native Americans — had complex, sophisticated civilisations, relationships with land and ecology that sustained them for tens of thousands of years, and governance systems that predate Western democracy by millennia. They were killed, dispossessed, their children forcibly removed and placed in institutions designed to eliminate their languages and cultures — a policy described, in official Canadian government documents, as designed to "kill the Indian in the child." These are not ancient crimes in the sense of being irrelevant. The intergenerational trauma is present. The land dispossession is present. The wealth gap between indigenous and non-indigenous populations is present. And still, the Western nations that committed these acts position themselves globally as the standard-bearers of human rights and democratic values — while indigenous peoples within their own borders continue to fight for the most basic recognition of their humanity and sovereignty.

The Architecture of Continued Control

The formal era of colonialism ended — in most places — in the mid-twentieth century. What replaced it was not liberation. It was a more sophisticated architecture of control that achieved many of the same ends: the flow of resources and wealth from the Global South to the Global North, the maintenance of political instability that keeps governments weak and dependent, and the cultural dominance that ensures the West remains the reference point, the standard, the authority.

This architecture has several components, and it is worth naming them clearly.

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank were designed in 1944, at Bretton Woods, by Western powers — primarily the United States and Britain — to manage the global economy in Western interests. When developing nations fall into debt crises — crises often generated by the same Western financial system — the IMF arrives with loans attached to conditions: cut public spending, privatise state assets, open markets to foreign competition, reduce subsidies on food and fuel. These conditions — known as structural adjustment — have consistently produced the same results across Africa, Latin America, and Asia: reduced welfare provision, higher costs of living for the poor, the transfer of publicly owned resources into private — often Western — hands, and deeper dependency. The loans are repaid. The conditions are not questioned. The cycle begins again.

The arms trade deserves its own reckoning. The United States, Britain, France, and other Western nations are the world's largest arms exporters. The wars that devastate the Global South — in Yemen, in the Sahel, in South Asia, in Central America — are fought with Western weapons, sold to whoever will pay, regardless of the consequences for the people caught in the middle. Britain sold arms to Saudi Arabia throughout the Yemen conflict, one of the worst humanitarian crises of recent decades. The profits went to British defence companies. The children who died in Yemen were not British.

There is a word for taking someone's resources, destabilising their country, selling weapons to those who oppress them, and then offering aid in response to the suffering produced. The word is not generosity. The word is not development. The word is not partnership.

And then there is the softer architecture: the NGO and development industry, the international media, the Western-dominated academic publishing system that determines whose knowledge counts as knowledge, the cultural industries that tell the world's stories overwhelmingly through a Western lens. None of this is neutral. All of it shapes the way the world is understood — who is civilised and who is chaotic, who is a freedom fighter and who is a terrorist, whose grief is worth airtime and whose is not.

They Have Never Been Honest Brokers — Not Once

I want to say this plainly, because it is hedged and softened constantly in polite discourse. Western powers have never acted as honest, neutral brokers in the affairs of the Global South. Not in South Asia, not in Africa, not in Latin America, not in the Middle East. Not once. Every intervention — military, economic, diplomatic — has served Western strategic and financial interests, dressed in the language of concern.

When the United States supported Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo for three decades, enabling one of the most corrupt and brutal regimes in African history, it did so because Mobutu was anti-communist and because Congo's minerals were accessible. When Britain supported the Saudi monarchy, decade after decade, it was because of oil and arms contracts. When France maintained its network of influence across Francophone Africa — what is known as *Françafrique* — supporting coups and propping up compliant leaders, it was to maintain access to resources and markets. The language of these relationships was always development, partnership, stability. The reality was extraction and control.

When they say they are there to help, ask who has benefited from the helping. Measure the decades. Count the wealth that moved, and in which direction it moved.

The United Nations, often held up as a counterweight to Western unilateralism, has a Security Council in which the United States, Britain, and France hold permanent veto power. No resolution that fundamentally threatens Western interests has ever passed. The international legal system — the International Criminal Court, for instance — prosecutes African leaders with regularity while Western leaders who ordered the invasion of Iraq, a war that killed hundreds of thousands and destabilised an entire region, face no accountability whatsoever. The architecture of international justice is not blind. It sees very clearly. It just chooses, consistently, what not to look at.

The Psychology We Must Name and Then Discard

Why, given all of this, do we still look to these powers for rescue? This is the question that requires honest examination, not comfortable deflection.

Colonialism was never only an economic and military project. It was a psychological one. It required, for its long-term maintenance, that the colonised come to believe in their own insufficiency. That their cultures were primitive, their governance incapable, their knowledge inferior, their languages inadequate for serious thought. This project was implemented through education systems — English-medium schools across South Asia, French lycées across Africa, mission schools across the Pacific — that taught children to see themselves and their heritage through a diminishing lens. It was implemented through religion, through law, through the constant performance of colonial authority as competence and order in contrast to native chaos.

Frantz Fanon, the Martinican psychiatrist and philosopher who lived and fought in Algeria, described this process with surgical clarity. The colonised person, he wrote, learns to see themselves through the eyes of the coloniser. They carry within them a voice that doubts their own worth, their own capability, their own right to lead. Decolonisation, Fanon insisted, was not only political. It had to be psychological. And psychological decolonisation is slower and harder than political independence.

We see this in South Asian diaspora communities in Britain — the instinct to seek white validation, to put white faces at the front of our organisations, to measure our success by how much approval we receive from the mainstream. We see it in African nations that send their most talented young people to be educated in European and American universities, where they absorb not only knowledge but the implicit assumption that the centre of everything important is elsewhere. We see it in the habit, across the Global South, of calling in Western mediators for conflicts that Western intervention often helped to create.

The Great White Hope is not just a political phenomenon. It is a wound. And like all wounds, healing it requires first acknowledging where it came from.

What Genuine Leadership Looks Like

There have always been alternative voices. There have always been leaders and thinkers who refused the colonial framework and insisted on something different. Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso. Patrice Lumumba in Congo. Salvador Allende in Chile. Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. Walter Rodney in Guyana. Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau. Leaders who said: we have our own knowledge, our own

resources, our own capacity to govern ourselves. Who tried to build genuine economic independence, genuine welfare states, genuine Pan-African or Pan-Southern solidarity.

Almost all of them were removed by force. Lumumba was murdered with CIA and Belgian involvement within months of Congolese independence. Sankara was assassinated — almost certainly with French knowledge — after four years of transformative governance that had made Burkina Faso food-sufficient and was eliminating debt. Allende was killed in a US-backed coup. Nkrumah was overthrown while abroad, in a coup that the CIA had been facilitating. The pattern is not subtle. When the Global South produces leaders who genuinely threaten the architecture of Western economic dominance, those leaders are eliminated. And then the West expresses concern about instability.

The people who killed Lumumba cannot be trusted to grieve for Congo. The people who backed Pinochet cannot be trusted to mourn for Chile. The people who drew the Sykes-Picot lines cannot be trusted to broker peace in the region those lines destroyed. The people who demanded Haiti pay for its own freedom cannot be trusted to lead Haiti's reconstruction.

This is not bitterness. This is logic. You do not ask the arsonist to lead the fire investigation. You do not ask the person who picked the lock to be the locksmith. History is not a matter of forgiveness and moving on when the structural consequences of what was done are still fully operative today.

A Word About Allies

None of this means that people of any background cannot contribute to justice. Solidarity across difference is real, valuable, and necessary. There are white Western individuals and organisations that have acted with genuine integrity, at genuine personal cost, in pursuit of justice for people who were not them. That matters and should be recognised.

But there is a crucial distinction — one that solidarity requires us to hold carefully. An ally stands beside, amplifies, and supports without seeking to lead or to own the struggle. An ally understands that their role is to use whatever privilege and access they have to remove obstacles and create space, not to fill that space themselves. An ally does not need to be the face of the movement, the author of the solution, or the voice that the mainstream hears. An ally is comfortable with a supporting role because they understand that the point is justice, not visibility.

The Great White Hope is different from an ally. The Great White Hope is, at its root, still centred on white agency. It still imagines that the solution flows from Western power and Western goodwill. It is still, even in its most benevolent form, a story in which we are the recipients and they are the givers. That structure must be dismantled, because it is itself a continuation of the colonial relationship, however kindly it presents itself.

What We Owe Each Other

The deepest argument against the Great White Hope is not about suspicion of white people. It is about the recognition that the Global South — Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific, indigenous peoples everywhere — possesses within itself the knowledge, the leadership, the cultural resources, and the moral authority to determine its own future. That this capacity has been suppressed, undermined, and systematically degraded does not mean it was destroyed. It means it requires recovery, support, and above all, the space to operate without constant interference.

Pan-African solidarity. South-South cooperation. Movements like ALBA in Latin America, like the African Union's vision of genuine economic integration, like the ongoing demands for reparations — not charity, not aid, but the return of what was taken — these are the directions in which genuine liberation lies. Not in the next Western initiative. Not in the next IMF programme. Not in the next white saviour documentary or the next international conference where the Global South's representatives are seated at the table but not at the head of it.

We owe it to everyone who resisted — to the Haitian revolutionaries, to the Mau Mau fighters in Kenya whom Britain imprisoned and tortured, to the ANC members who spent decades in prison, to the Palestinians who have refused, generation after generation, to simply disappear, to every freedom fighter across our many histories who was called a terrorist for wanting to be free — we owe it to all of them to stop asking permission from the people who called them criminals.

The world was told that colonialism was civilisation. That slavery was order. That dispossession was progress. That resistance was terrorism. Every one of those lies was told by the same people who now offer to help us. We are not required to believe them. We are not required to trust them. We are required only to trust ourselves — and we are long overdue.

The Long Work

I write this from Britain, in 2024, knowing that the problems are enormous and the solutions will be neither quick nor simple. Genuine economic sovereignty for the Global South requires the restructuring of international financial institutions. It requires cancellation of debts that are themselves the product of unjust lending. It requires an end to the arms trade that fuels the conflicts that justify the interventions that

perpetuate the dependency. It requires reparations — real, structural reparations — for slavery, for colonialism, for the specific acts of deliberate destruction that have been documented and in many cases admitted. It requires the reform of international legal institutions to actually hold powerful nations accountable.

None of this will be led by the people who benefit from the current arrangement. It will be led by those who have been fighting for it all along. By the movements, the communities, the thinkers, the organisers who never stopped insisting on a different world.

They do not need a white saviour. They never did. They need the obstacles removed — the debt, the interference, the weapons, the extractive corporations, the rigged institutions. Remove the obstacles, and the world the ordinary people of South Asia and Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean have always wanted — a world of dignity, accountability, genuine welfare, and real freedom — is not only possible. It is what was always owed.

Stop waiting for the Great White Hope. The hope was always ours.

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