

AFRICA, Such As It Is...

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"The Berlin Conference was Africa's undoing in more ways than one. The colonial powers superimposed their domains on the African continent. By the time independence returned to Africa in 1950, the realm had acquired a legacy of political fragmentation that could neither be eliminated nor made to operate satisfactorily."*

In 1884 at the request of Portugal, German chancellor Otto von Bismark called together the major western powers of the world to negotiate questions and end confusion over the control of Africa. Bismark appreciated the opportunity to expand Germany's sphere of influence over Africa and desired to force Germany's rivals to struggle with one another for territory.

At the time of the conference, 80% of Africa remained under traditional and local control. What ultimately resulted was a hodgepodge of geometric boundaries that divided Africa into fifty irregular countries. This new map of the continent was superimposed over the one thousand indigenous cultures and regions of Africa. The new countries lacked rhyme or reason and divided coherent groups of people and merged together disparate groups who really did not get along.

Fourteen countries were represented by a plethora of ambassadors when the conference opened in Berlin on November 15, 1884. The countries represented at the time included Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway (unified from 1814-1905), Turkey, and the United States of America. Of these fourteen nations, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Portugal were the major players in the conference, controlling most of colonial Africa at the time.

The initial task of the conference was to agree that the Congo River and Niger River mouths and basins would be considered neutral and open to trade. Despite its neutrality, part of the Congo Basin became a personal kingdom for Belgium's King

Leopold II and under his rule, over half of the region's population died.

At the time of the conference, only the coastal areas of Africa were colonized by the European powers. At the Berlin Conference the European colonial powers scrambled to gain control over the interior of the continent. The conference lasted until February 26, 1885 - a three month period where colonial powers haggled over geometric boundaries in the interior of the continent, disregarding the cultural and linguistic boundaries already established by the indigenous African population.

Following the conference, the give and take continued. By 1914, the conference participants had fully divided Africa among themselves into fifty countries.

Major colonial holdings included:

- Great Britain desired a Cape-to-Cairo collection of colonies and almost succeeded though their control of Egypt, Sudan (Anglo-Egyptian Sudan), Uganda, Kenya (British East Africa), South Africa, and Zambia, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), and Botswana. The British also controlled Nigeria and Ghana (Gold Coast).
- France took much of western Africa, from Mauritania to Chad (French West Africa) and Gabon and the Republic of Congo (French Equatorial Africa).
- Belgium and King Leopold II controlled the Democratic Republic of Congo (Belgian Congo).
- Portugal took Mozambique in the east and Angola in the west.
- Italy's holdings were Somalia (Italian Somaliland) and a portion of Ethiopia.
- Germany took Namibia (German Southwest Africa) and Tanzania (German East Africa).
- Spain claimed the smallest territory - Equatorial Guinea (Rio Muni).

* de Blij, H.J. and Peter O. Muller *Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997. Page 340.

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In 1951 Iran nationalised its oil industry, then controlled by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now BP), and Iranian oil was subjected to an international [embargo](#). In an effort to bring Iranian oil production back to international markets, the [U.S. State Department](#) suggested the creation of a "Consortium" of major oil companies. The "Consortium for Iran" was subsequently formed by the following companies:

- *Anglo-Persian Oil Company* (United Kingdom) : This subsequently became Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and then British Petroleum. Following the amalgamation of [Amoco](#) (which in turn was formerly Standard Oil of Indiana) and [Atlantic Richfield](#) into British Petroleum, the name was shortened to BP in 2000.
- *Gulf Oil* (United States): In 1984 most of Gulf was acquired by SoCal and enlarged SoCal entity became Chevron. The smaller parts of Gulf Oil was acquired by BP and [Cumberland Farms](#). A network of service stations in the northeastern United States still bears the Gulf name.
- *Royal Dutch Shell* (Netherlands/United Kingdom)
- *Standard Oil of California (SoCal)* (United States): This subsequently became Chevron in 1984 when SoCal acquired Gulf Oil.
- *Standard Oil of New Jersey (Esso)* (United States) : This subsequently became Exxon, which renamed itself ExxonMobil following the acquisition of [Mobil](#) in 1999.
- *Standard Oil Co. of New York (Socony)* (United States) : This subsequently became Mobil, which was acquired by Exxon in 1999 to form ExxonMobil
- *Texaco* (United States) : This was acquired by Chevron in 2001.

The head of the Italian state oil company, [Enrico Mattei](#) sought membership for the Italian oil company [Eni](#), but was rejected by what he dubbed the "Seven Sisters" - the [Anglo-Saxon](#) companies which largely controlled the Middle East's oil

production after [World War II](#). British writer [Anthony Sampson](#) took over the term when he wrote the book *The Seven Sisters* in 1975, to describe the shadowy oil [cartel](#), which tried to eliminate competitors and control the world's oil resource.

Being well-organized and able to negotiate as a [cartel](#), the Seven Sisters were initially able to exert considerable power over [Third World](#) oil producers. However, in recent decades the dominance of the Seven Sisters and their successor companies has been challenged by the following trends.

- the increasing influence of the [OPEC cartel](#) (formed in 1960),
- a declining share of world oil & [gas reserves](#) held by [OECD](#) countries and
- the emergence of powerful [state-owned oil companies](#) in emerging-market economies.

As of 2010, the surviving companies from the Seven Sisters are BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil and Royal Dutch Shell, which form four members of the "[supermajors](#)" group.

The "New Seven Sisters"

The [Financial Times](#) has used the label the "New Seven Sisters" to describe a group of what it argues are the most influential national oil and gas companies based in countries outside of the [OECD](#). According to the *Financial Times* this group comprises:

- [China National Petroleum Corporation](#) (China)
- [Gazprom](#) (Russia)
- [National Iranian Oil Company](#) (Iran)
- [Petrobras](#) (Brazil)
- [PDVSA](#) (Venezuela)
- [Petronas](#) (Malaysia)
- [Saudi Aramco](#) (Saudi Arabia)