

LmunA 2024

Research report

Forum: General Assembly Fourth Committee (GA4)
Issue: Discovering the role of P5 in combating climate change and environmental degradation
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Position: Chair and Deputy Chair



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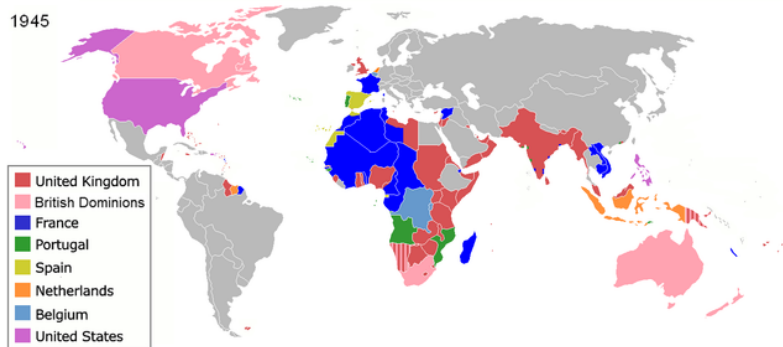
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Introduction

The role of modern states, namely, the P5 (China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States) in the combat of climate change and environmental degradation remains great, even in an era of apparent decolonization. Through the government and external companies, these nations tend to extract natural resources from smaller nations for their benefit. To combat climate change, therefore, the P5 will not only have to look inward toward their own behaviours, but also outward to their behaviours in other nations. By stopping their activity in these nations, they would directly and positively affect the issue of climate change.

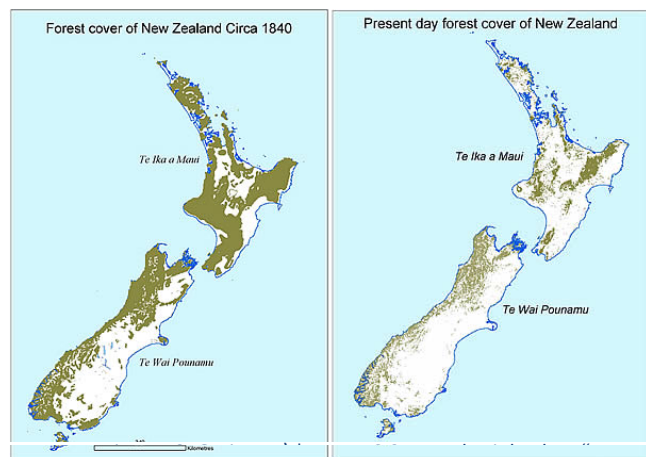
The fact that in the modern day the P5 play a major role in environmental degradation by their misuse of other nations through neocolonialism does not mean this did not happen historically. In history there have been a plethora of examples of where colonialism has negatively impacted the environment or natural resources of colonies. The consequences of the behaviour of what is now



the P5 and some other nations negatively impact these countries to this day. *Figure 1* shows the areas and nations that were under colonial rule in 1945, a figure that is closer to the modern day. Some have, of course, been affected more than others, but negative environmental impacts of colonisation to any degree can

almost be considered omnipresent.

These negative effects will include environmental degradation of the colony itself. *Figure 2* shows a map of forest coverage in New Zealand circa 1840 compared to the present day. This figure shows the negative impact of foreign colonialism on the natural resources of a country. This effect is widespread: natural resources such as timber, oil and minerals are extracted by colonists from colonies into the present day, negatively impacting the richness



and, in turn, biodiversity of nature on the colonies. The cutting down of forests for timber, for example, has a great ecological impact on the species that lived in the forest or the maintenance

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of soil, as erosion could have been prevented by the trees' roots. These are all ways that (neo)colonisation could cause environmental degradation and thus foster the reduction of biodiversity and speed up the process of climate change.

This research report will explain, using specific examples, the impact of the P5 on environmental degradation and climate change as a whole in their nations and colonies, and discuss the possibilities for the P5 to improve upon these issues, both in the context of their homeland and of their former or current colonies or spheres of influence.

Definitions of key terms

Neocolonialism: The continued political influence exerted by a nation over another nation, often by a former colonist on a former colony. Influence can be expressed not only by territorial conquest, which is rare in the modern day, but also by economic influence, dependency, and even political and diplomatic pressure.

Climate Colonialism: A type of neocolonialism, where wealthy nations continue to impose degradation of the environment on former colonies, which are often more impoverished and developing, while reaping the benefits of the produce.

Carbon Imperialism: Could also be considered a type of neocolonialism, where former colonists impose their climate agendas on developing countries, with disregard for the colonists' environmental needs. This will apply especially to P5 members with ambitious climate policy.

Extractivism: The economic model to generate revenue through vast extraction and export of natural resources, which can lead to economic dependency (see topic 2).

Environmental Sovereignty: The right for nations, especially former colonies, to determine their own environmental policy for the combat of climate change as well as the protection of their own natural ecosystems.

Environmental Justice: A movement which focuses on distribution of environmental benefits and burdens in a fair manner, so that all states are affected by climate change equally.

Ecological Debt: The debt that industrialised, former colonist nations owe to developing nations, former colonies, when it comes to the historical environmental degradation and contributing to climate change. If the Ecological Debt is none, Environmental Justice has been achieved.

General overview

Both historically and in the present day, the P5 has had a major role in contributing to the degradation of environmental systems and, as a result, negative development of climate change. There are a plethora of examples in history and the present day of all 5 P5 nations that

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can support this. The 'Global North', as *Global Citizen* puts it (Lewis), contributes to 92% of carbon emissions, while the 'Global South'- colonies of the P5, mainly – experiences the major consequences of these emissions – rising sea levels, extreme weather, etc. (Lewis). Colonisation of territories for industrial gain, at the expense of the environment of the colonies, is not just an aspect of history, but also a topic in the modern day. These are thus examples of neocolonialism that will be discussed (Guerrero). This general overview will discuss some examples of present detriments to the climate relating to colonialism for each of the nations of the P5. It is these issues among many others that will infer the role of the P5 in combating climate change with reference to these colonial projects.

The first nation of the P5 that will be discussed is the United States. With regards to neocolonial practices contributing to climate change and environmental degradation, the Willow Project springs to mind mostly. Even though this is on the mainland of the USA, neocolonialism can also define to mean in a broader context taking over foreign lands for a country's own use. It was a project by ConocoPhillips, an American oil company, to expand existing drilling infrastructure in northern Alaska, with all the associated infrastructure (Turrentine). Besides the fact that fossil fuels produce greenhouse gases and thus contribute to climate change, there is significant evidence to suggest that the infrastructure associated with the Willow Project (roads, pipelines, etc), harm the ecosystems of Alaska themselves. "Coastal erosion, melting sea ice, [and] thawing permafrost" (Turrentine) are examples of this. Furthermore, it has the potential to interrupt the habitats of polar bears and other animals and lose 532 acres of wetland (Turrentine). For this reason, environmental organisations such as the NDRC and Greenpeace have been fighting against the Willow project. However, the economic benefit of such projects must also be considered: an estimated 600 million barrels of oil would be produced in 30 years, a figure which would produce significant revenue for the United States which could be placed into green energy (Nilsen). Another example of negative environmental consequences as a result of neocolonialism is the question of Lithium mining in Chile. Two main companies, one Chilean and one American, extract lithium from the salt flats in the Atacama Plateau, in northern Chile (Brigham). Lithium, used in batteries, is all the more vital to the world, which puts more pressure on Chile for lithium to be extracted more thoroughly. The means of lithium extraction in Chile, brine evaporation is very detrimental to the local environment, as vast amounts of water is contaminated and used up, drying up former wetlands in the area (Greenfield). One local said: "We used to have a river before that now doesn't exist. There isn't a drop of water," (Greenfield).

The second nation of the P5 that will be discussed is China. China has been part of a general trend of asserting more and more of its influence over other nations. One example is its influence on the Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC. While a fascinating case study, this has been discussed at length in the research report for Topic 2. Please refer to this research report for further information about this. However, the DRC is not the only example of Chinese influence in foreign nations in the modern day. The Amazon rainforest has seen great pressure from China to be cut down to make space for food production, namely soy and beef, its two great imports (Araújo). Soy is one of the only products that China cannot make by themselves easily and is obliged to import. Jair Bolsonaro, the former Brazilian president, widely prioritised economic growth over environmental considerations, which allowed China to continue exerting its influence to increase food production for China's ever-growing population and middle class. It

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also capitalised on weak law enforcement and environmental policy to continue this trend of profiting (Araújo).

The third P5 nation that will be discussed is the United Kingdom. Though generally a developed nation with commitments to minimise neo-colonialist tendencies and its influences on other, sovereign, nations, there are still some examples of tendencies which influence other regions. One example of this is the UK's policy of hydraulic fracturing, or more colloquially, fracking, which creates natural gas and petroleum products (Lin-Schweitzer). The UK has participated in on- and- offshore fracking. Especially onshore fracking is invasive to the economies of the nations on which the practices occur and can thus be considered, to some extent, as an example of neocolonialism. Fracking itself has disastrous effects on the local and global environment, creating large amounts of wastewater and emitting greenhouse gases as well as toxic pollutants (Lin-Schweitzer). The loud nature of fracking creates sound pollution in the surroundings.

Furthermore, as with many other practices listed in this Overview, there is evidence of significant ecological detriment and environmental degradation. Fracking and oil extraction practices in general have been linked to a decline of species and ecosystem diversity as well as migratory disruptions in established species and significant habitat degradation for the ecosystem (Lin-Schweitzer). It should be noted that for this reason among others there has been a ban on fracking in place in the UK for some time, temporarily lifted by Prime Minister Liz Truss in 2022 but reinstated by her successor Rishi Sunak. There is also evidence that the UK, like many other Western nations, may be contributing to environmental degradation and climate change through waste disposal in nations like Turkey (Snowdon). According to Greenpeace, 210,000 tonnes of waste and especially E-waste (electrical appliances) of British origin was found in Turkey. The UK, generating the most plastic waste per capita in the world apart from the United States, thus contributes to environmental degradation in Turkey. This waste ends up in landfills and can contaminate waters, releasing microplastics into the environment, among other detriments to the environment (Snowdon).

France, the fourth P5 nation, has in history and in the modern day contributed to climate change and environmental degradation, despite developing into a developed country that stands to battle climate change. France has a long history of oil exploitation in West Africa, starting in 1947 and pertaining especially to Algeria (Conkar). France continued its influence and exploited the area for oil even after the colonial age had largely ended, thus an example of neocolonialism. Even after Algerian independence, France attempted to prevent involvement and investment from Africa and Europe in the area to maintain its monopoly (Conkar). The infrastructure from years of oil extraction in Algeria has been detrimental to its natural landscape, as with many oil drilling facilities around the world (Henni). Furthermore, France's uranium mining practices in Niger are further examples of contributing factors to environmental degradation and climate change contribution. France imported great amounts of Uranium through Areva, a nuclear energy superpower. Areva's two subsidiaries extracted 114,346 metric tonnes (Oxfam) of Nigerien uranium, resulting in a payout of 2,3 trillion francs, of which Niger was paid 300 million (Oxfam). There is evidence that these mining practices cause severe human health and environmental damages, including land and water pollution with radioactive

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waste and radiation exposure, as well as damage to sandstone aquifers in the region and increasing uranium concentration in water (Larsen and Mamosso). However, it should be noted that as of 21 June 2024, Niger's military government has revoked French access to the uranium mines, meaning this is no longer a current issue. Lastly, France has a long colonial history with influence in various African and Asian nations that influence climate practices. For more information about this, please refer to the research reports for Topic 1 and 2.

The final P5 nation to be discussed is the Russian Federation, or Russia. One prime example of its practices which contribute to climate change and environmental degradation is its drilling in the Arctic. There are an estimated 90 million barrels worth of undiscovered oil barrels in the Arctic, which can be extracted (Just Energy). While Russia is the largest and most legitimate claimant to this oil, it is not the only one, as nations like Canada and Norway also have access to the Arctic and right to extract this oil if they wish to do so. Similarly to the Willow Project, the infrastructure necessary for these kinds of oil projects threaten to disrupt the delicate ecological balance, especially in the Siberian forests. These practices can harm the delicate ecosystems in the Arctic (Just Energy). Furthermore, Russia's long standing gas extraction practices are especially detrimental to the environment. Besides carbon dioxide, methane is also emitted in the atmosphere in this process, a far more potent greenhouse gas (Stover). This methane production is high because of weak regulations, leaky pipelines and poorly managed operations, issues that are largely ignored by the state (Stover). Like arctic drilling, gas extraction affects land areas in Siberia, which has a fragile ecosystem (Stover).

Major parties involved

United Kingdom

The UK is one of the leading promoters of various green initiatives. For example, the first Security council meeting concerning climate change in 2011 was in fact organised by the UK (Scartozzi). Currently, they have taken big steps towards establishing a green economy, in 2019 they enacted a law 'committing itself to reaching net zero greenhouse gas emission by 2050' as well as running fully on green energy by 2035 (The Economist). They also promote reforestation, as well as green infrastructures. However, their goals are very high. Although Britain is considered one of the most progressive countries in terms of recycling, they are in fact sending around 40% of their waste to less developed countries such as Turkey, Malaysia, and Poland, for a cheaper recycle (Snowdon). Undeniably, the United Kingdom had one of the largest colonial empires of humankind, and their influence is still visible to this day, Britain using less developed countries to aid themselves in their green initiative.

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China

China differs from the other P5 nations and does not have a track record of colonialism. Instead, their global influence is based on the economic dependency of other nations on the Chinese economy, as well as their influence and investment in foreign economies. As mentioned previously, China is one of the main consumers of the DRC's natural resources, although the product made from them is globally used and significantly needed, it damages the local income, and makes the natives more vulnerable to natural disasters, climate change, and economical crisis (Egyin). As visible in Figure 3, China has one of the highest emissions globally (Ritchie and Roser). However, their high levels of emissions are justified by the fact that China is still a developing nation, and the Developed nations of the 1st World which want to impose emission regulations can sacrifice cheaper energy sources for greener ones as their economy is developed already, which China cannot do.

United States

The United States, different from other 1st World P5 members, is heavily affected by climate change, by climatic disasters such as hurricanes etc. The US government has taken on multiple projects to reduce their greenhouse emissions and aid in the global effort in reducing the emissions (Allen). For example, the Biden-Harris Administration and the U.S. Global Change Research Program has noted that the American emissions have in fact decreased and are significantly lower than the peak of 2007 (Allen). On the other hand, as mentioned previously, the USA does have their share of oil usage in Alaska, as well as, history of influence in various regions around the world heavily influencing their economy. For example, in Cuba & Honduras. In Honduras, the main income comes from exports to the USA, which then benefits the USA as they buy cheaper produce without emitting, while the people of Honduras suffer malnutrition due to a lack of produce left for them (The World Bank).

France

France is another country with a history of colonialism, their influence strong even after the liberation of their colonies. As mentioned previously France does perform actions of neocolonialism in various African countries, which are more beneficial to France. Nevertheless, France engages in many pro-green energy initiatives. For example, their

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future PPE plan involves cutting coal use by 2027 and all fossil fuels by 2050 (Lafrance and Portala).

Russia

According to CSIS Russia is warming at a rate 2.5 times faster than any other country and will face many natural disasters and climate crises in the future (Newlin and Conley). Currently the Russian economy in combination with climate change is a vicious cycle. The permafrost in Siberia holds tons of frozen methane which are released into the atmosphere with rising temperatures further increasing them (Stover). Additionally, Russia heavily relies on oil for both produce and income. Russia is one of the main suppliers of oil in Europe and holds economic power over their consumers. Considering the benefits of oil for Russia they have not made significant progress towards green initiatives (Stover).

Annual CO₂ emissions, 2022

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from fossil fuels and industry. Land-use change is not included.

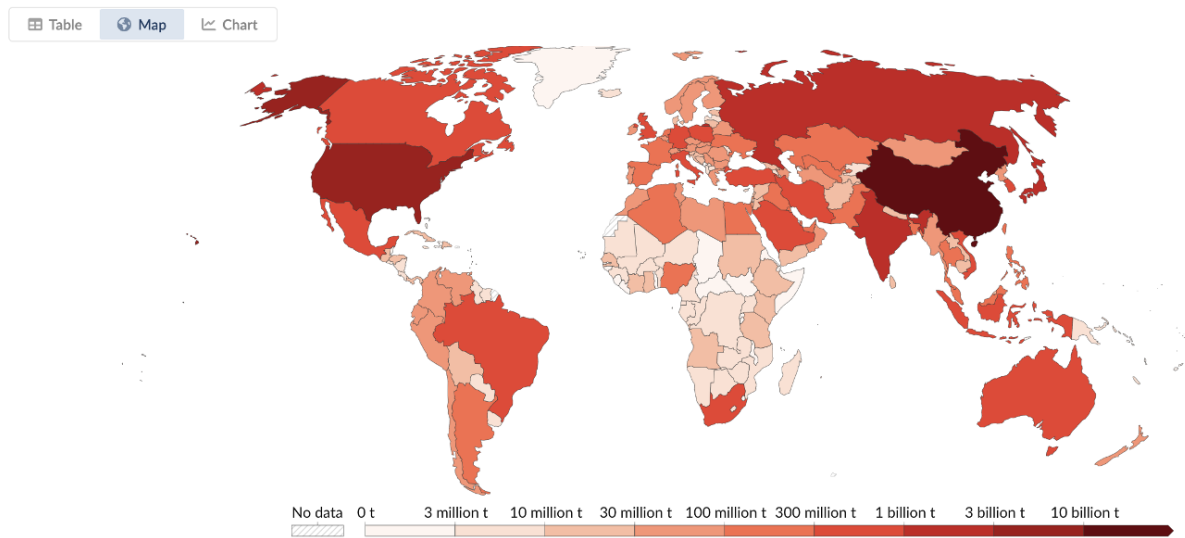


Figure 3, Ritchie, Hannah, and Max Roser. "CO₂ Emissions." *Our World in Data*, 2024, ourworldindata.org/co2-emissions. Accessed 16 Aug. 2024.

Conference of Parties (COP)

Made following the Paris Agreement to ensure global collaboration towards cutting emissions. This conference which meets every year involves both mitigation and adaptation tactics and strategies to help all nations around the world (UNFCCC). It also sets ambitious goals to be achieved by different countries based on their emissions

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level, their development, and ability to fund such actions. Through such considerate planning, COP can make significant progress without starting less developed economies (UNFCCC).

UNFCCC

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change created in 1994, focuses on climate change matters and preventing the 'dangerous' and harmful human behaviour such as neocolonialism, natural resource exploitation, and deforestation. Understating that the developed nations are the ones that have most significantly increased human induced emissions, they are the primary focus to lead the transition into a greener future (UNFCCC, "What Is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?").

Green Climate Fund (GCF)

A program organised by UNFCCC in 2010 which focuses on funding developing and less developed nations in their effort to combat climate change (Green Climate Fund). The primary investors and sponsors are the developed nations such as the members of P5 (Green Climate Fund).

Timeline of Key Events

Pre-1900s	The Colonial Era is at its height, with the Scramble for Africa as well as earlier American colonialism establishing widespread European rule in Asian, African and Latin or South American nations (Matz).
1914-1918	World War I, impacting colonies economically with future environmental consequences. This applies especially to colonies sending troops or fighting in the war (Matz).
1919	Treaty of Versailles influences colonial policy and indirectly starts an age of colonial reform (Matz).
1945	The UN Security Council is established, with five permanent members China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Matz).
1949	UN Scientific Conference on the Conservation and Utilisation of Resources occurs, which first sheds light on the consequences of

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colonialism on climate change and environmental degradation (Petruzzello).

1950s	Awareness for environmental issues increased and became part of decolonisation movements (Petruzzello).
1960	UN Declaration of Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, as well as the Year of Africa, 17 nations achieving independence from their colonists (Petruzzello).
1972	Stockholm Conference (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment); start of international environmental diplomacy (Petruzzello).
1970s	Newly independent countries address environmental degradation caused by colonial exploitation, even while some colonists still exert influence on their colonies or spheres of influence.
1980	Brandt report: link between development and environment is laid, affecting North-South Relations (Petruzzello).
1992	Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro resulting in Rio Declaration and Agenda 21; P5 members significantly involved (Petruzzello).
2005	Kyoto Protocol comes into effect: industrialised countries transition to reduce greenhouse gases (Petruzzello).
2015	Paris Agreement, a global accord with developed and developing countries to combat climate change, significant involvement from P5 nations as well as former colonies (Petruzzello).

Previous attempts to solve the issue

The Paris Agreement continues to be one of the most significant treaties in terms of combating Climate change. Along with this treaty, the creation of COP has begun a fruitful collaboration between member states towards the common goal of green earth, such as the Green Climate Fund, and cutting down the overall global emissions through carbon trading. This agreement created various goals for all members to achieve, and along with their raising awareness initiative the focus on combating climate change has only increased (UNFCCC, “The Paris Agreement”). Additionally, to prevent resource exploitation of less-developed states, as well as exploitation of their economies for the benefit of the developed nations, this agreement also

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requires that starting in 2024 all climate related actions must be reported transparently to prevent the misuse of power (UNFCCC, “The Paris Agreement”).

The final goal of the Paris Agreement is to prevent the global temperature from exceeding over 2 degrees, and by the end of the century decrease it to 1.5 degrees (UNFCCC, “The Paris Agreement”). Although the current actions are proving successful, there must be more initiatives taken to achieve these ambitious goals.

The Green Climate Fund active since 2010 is the largest climate fund existing and plays a significant role in providing and aiding the developing nations. Their focus is to help transition, both environmentally, industry and economically (Green Climate Fund). They also have a special focus on human security, the livelihood and moving of the citizens, as well as green land use and protection of forests Ecosystem (Green Climate Fund). This organisation believes that the key to mitigating climate change is proper financing, thus, they collaborate with developing nations to help the more vulnerable nations of the Third World in adapting and developing a greener and safer economy (Green Climate Fund).

Carbon Trading is another tactic developed by the Paris agreement, and the members of COP, which is slowly being implemented. This tactic involves setting a specific emissions limit per year and per organisation. Each organisation then receives legal credits allowing a specific number of emissions that they are allowed to produce (Carbon Credits). However, considering that some organisations require more than others, the organisations are allowed to trade their credits to allow for a smooth transition, while also limiting the overall emissions. Additionally, this program promotes collaboration and can become a source of income for smaller companies. Currently, countries around the world that practise carbon trading in some form include Canada, the EU, the UK, China, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea (Carbon Credits).

Possible solutions

There are many approaches one can take to solving the issue at hand. Namely, one can approach from the perspective of colonies, and from the colonists’ perspective. These two perspectives on legislation, whom it might benefit and what effects it will have, will be discussed in two parts.

Firstly, one can solve the issue from the colonies’ perspective. This will include legislation to help colonies on their way to reduce the impact of practices from foreign nations. International legislation such as that from the UN can help with this, but developing nations will ultimately need significant financial assistance to be able to enact policy that will contribute to the maintenance of ecology. Furthermore, a stable government is required in these colonies to be able to entrust these nations with

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significant amounts of money that can be used to combat environmental degradation and prevent misuse of these funds.

Nations can also be encouraged from an international perspective to decrease their polluting patterns to contribute to the reduction of fossil fuel output and thus the deceleration of climate change and global warming. The issue can furthermore be solved from the perspective of the colonists. This can be done through international pressure to reduce and eventually completely stop its influence and neocolonial practices in foreign nations. However, a fine balance needs to be struck to be able to achieve this and maintain international trade and not harm the international economy. Alternatively, a solution could also be to encourage countries to seek to make their practices more sustainable, and more conscious of the local environments to prevent environmental degradation; this way, countries can continue their economic income and there is less risk of damage to the international economy, which can hurt many developing nations. A balance between these two can be found depending on the stance of the nation.

Further reading

1. [Information about the Brandt Report](#)
2. [Article about Environmentalism and Colonialism](#)
3. [JSTOR Article about Environmentalism and Colonialism](#)
4. [JSTOR Article about Environmental Injustice and Colonialism](#)

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