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The United States of America: an imperial manifestation? a study of the strengths and weaknesses of empire theory

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Abstract

This research sets to understand the intricacies of modern Empire and in particular the United States of America as the central agent of neoliberal imperialism. This is done with the objective of assessing the accuracy of Empire theory as an international relations tool of analysis. Empire theory has gained rising academic attention since the early 2000s, this research sought to assess its place and use when analysing the United States as Empire. In particular, the study focused on Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin's version of informal Empire and Empire by invitation. These notions were understood in the relations existing between the United States and its client states, Mexico and South Korea, via the medium of international financial institutions and trade agreements, namely the International Monetary Fund and the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement. Mexico and South Korea were clearly described as neoliberal states operating within Empire. Yet, this study sought to challenge the concept and the theory of Empire by investigating these client states' political voices. Their agenda-setting abilities were analysed within the G20 context, thanks to its rotational presidency within the forum. The researcher sought to uncover whether Mexico and South Korea had the ability to shape discussions and break away from the neoliberal discourse, and therefore Empire. The findings were of mixed results as it was established that while Mexico steps further away than South Korea from neoliberal perspectives, both client states still formulate their policies within a neoliberal framework, as the United States does not oppose or contest their agendas. While a fundamental conclusion was not reached, it was settled that Empire theory is still accurate in describing inter-capitalist state relations however it does not analytically grasp the rising opportunities existing for states, internal or external to the neoliberal context, to confront Empire.