

States pursuing empires

[History](#), [Empires](#)



s Pursuing Empires In Shmuel Eisenstadt's monumental analysis, *The Political Systems of Empire*, a purely political definition of the concept states that empires are centralized, bureaucratic forms of rule which should be contrasted to modern states characterized, inter alia, by the "greater differentiation of political activities, the distribution of political rights or the weakening of traditional hereditary patterns of legitimation of rulers." A more comprehensive and specific definition was posited by Michael Doyle, who explained that empires are relationships of political control by some political societies over the effective sovereignty of other political societies and that it can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social or cultural dependence. (19)

There are numerous reasons why states pursue empire-building. Economic motives however is the most applicable among these. The case of Western Europe, for instance, highlights this with the intensified political, economic, and military competition among rivals for resources, which by nature were scarce at any given time in any given place. (Deng 1999, p. 207) Here, European states and chartered companies such as the British East India Company and the Portuguese Estado da India, among others, sought new sources of wealth, which resulted to the sudden unleashing of market power, the spectacular growth in trade and the continuous expansion of overseas colonies.

In addition, a number of great thinkers endorse empire-building as a means defending a country's economic and political interests. Notoriously, even Karl Marx agreed in *The Communist Manifesto* that the gun is the best way to make the point when capitalism encountered "barbarians". (Marx & Engels

1963) Machiavelli's notion of *necessita* in his *Discourse*, also fundamentally supports empire building or the expansion of territories as necessary once its dominion had been extended beyond a certain scope. For him, it is important to expand - so much so that, as is well known, Machiavelli measures the quality of different possible constitutions for cities by how suitable they are to this end. (Bock, Skinner & Viroli 1990, 37) In his discussion of the Roman Empire, Machiavelli has argued that expansive government is pushed forward by the dialectic of the social and political forces of the Republic. There are those who criticize empire building including its modern version - imperialism. Hobson, for example, in *Imperialism: A Study*, wrote that empire-building denies many traditional liberties to colonial people and that he condemned it as an enemy of peace since it caused war and necessitated huge military expenditures. (95-96) It is in Hobson's critique, where Lenin reportedly understood how empire building became a necessary structural stage in the evolution of the European modern state. It was in this area where he learned how a country can use imperialism to transfer outside their own borders the political contradictions that arise within each single country. (Hardt & Negri 2000, 232)

Empire building today is possible especially in the analyses of the state and the dynamics of the modern world market. Having achieved the global level, capitalist development is faced directly with the multitude, without mediation. As a consequence, the dialectic or the science of the limit and its organization evaporates. Class struggle, pushing the nation-states toward its abolition and thus going beyond the barriers posed by it, proposes the constitution of Empire. Without such barriers, the situation of struggle is

completely open.

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