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SPHERES OF INFLUENCE - SPHERES OF CONFLICT?

The rise and fall of world empires, the intensifying interdependence of nation states, and deepening frameworks of global governance have all been survived by a crucial element of the global political order as we know it today. Spheres of influence persist in their centrality to the organization of global dominance patterns as a foreign policy tool used by great powers across time and space. Throughout history states looked to expand, just as today's nations seek to extend their reach globally. The Crusades, the Opium Wars, and the Scramble for Africa are just a few examples of the contests by global actors for the extension of their influence into foreign territories. The creation of spheres of influence and framing the global political order in accordance with vital interests of great powers has persisted today, crucially defining the dynamics of modern politics. Spheres of influence, however, are fluid precisely because of the evolving national interests and dynamic geopolitical conditions, which causes permanent contestation among states aiming to reinforce existing power relations through coercion. As evident in the configuration of the global political order during the Cold War and the transition to what is today often called the 'New Cold War', the fluidity of spheres of influence due to the changing relations between great global powers - China, Russia, and the USA, their evolving national interests, and dynamic geopolitics, continually generates conflict. Why, then, these



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powers remain devoted to the cultivation of spheres of influence despite the inevitability of conflict? The reason for their reliance on spheres of influence is simply that “bad behavior is almost always good politics” (Bueno de Mesquita).

Spheres of influence denote power relations and disproportionate authority of great powers over sovereign territories, creating patterns of international relations that constitute the global political order. They serve as extensions of great power’s national policies and reflect their vital national interests. Great powers, however, are not static. On the contrary – they experience periods of growth or stagnation, assume varying roles in global politics, and adjust their national interests. China, Russia, and the USA are three modern great powers with significant historic roles, evolving national identities, and consequently ever-changing foreign policy aims. Hence, their spheres of influence are fluid, as they transform over time in response to the changing strength of great powers and dynamic geopolitical conditions. As a consequence, conflict remains the defining characteristic of spheres of influence.

First, spheres of influence generate conflict through asymmetric power relations between hegemony and areas under their influence. In acquiring a sphere of influence, great powers challenge sovereign nations by exercising influence over their domestic policymaking. Furthermore, the acquisition of spheres of influence often requires contestation among a plurality of great powers, in which any extension of a sphere of influence by one great power indicates a loss for the other. Additionally, by infringing on states’ sovereignty great powers may contradict international norms, thus finding themselves in conflict with the international community.



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Second, spheres of influence lead to conflict because any strategy utilized for the acquisition and maintenance of spheres of influence generates opposition; may the strategy be soft or hard power. Utilizing soft power as “the ability to get what one wants by attraction rather than coercion and payments,” (Hast, 12) may lead to conflict because of ideological and economic power struggles that such strategies reinforce. “Hard power, by contrast, indicates economic and military might,” (Hast, 12) and provokes conflict with outright aggression. Thus, no matter what strategy great powers employ, spheres of influence are fundamentally unstable because they compel great powers to engage in continual contestation with external actors and internal opposition.

The Cold War period was one of intense contest for the expansion of spheres of influence of both the American and Soviet bloc. Conflict that resulted from the fundamental ideological struggle for leadership in the global political and economic order between Communism and liberalism escalated to include not only ideological, but also economic and military confrontations between the two great powers. When the bipolar world of the Cold War ended it was replaced by global American hegemony. Such geopolitical reality, however, was transformed with China’s consolidation as a great power and Russia’s revival in the 2000s. Today’s multipolarity, often identified as the ‘New Cold War’, is yet again characterized by intense competition for spheres of influence leading to conflict. Despite the changing national interests of China, Russia, and the USA, geopolitical developments, and the replacement of



power-oriented political realism with liberal approach to politics based on economic interdependence, spheres of influence remain a crucial foreign policy instrument.

During the Cold War, the acquisition and maintenance of spheres of influence was both a means and an end to the American and Soviet foreign policy. In extending their ideological, economic, and military influence to foreign territories, both states wished to demonstrate their primacy as global hegemony. By partitioning Europe into two blocks, the USA and the USSR successfully strengthened their domination in their respective European spheres of influence which remained unchallenged until the fall of the USSR in 1991. Such a contest for global domination, however, spread regional conflict across the world. The ideological conflict between the Soviet Communism and American liberalism during their search for new spheres of influence manifested itself also economically and militarily. Throughout the Cold War, it spilled over to previously undisputed territories such as the Strait of Taiwan and Yugoslavia. Both events demonstrate how existing, as well as contested spheres of influence invoke conflict despite differences in strategies. Whereas the U.S.-Soviet contest for influence over Taiwan took place militarily due to their use of hard power, similar contest for influence in the SFRY mostly included soft power. Both events, however, generated conflict.

Taiwan and the surrounding maritime territory has historically been a contested sphere of influence between regional powers – the Chinese and Japanese empire. Furthermore, Taiwan rather suddenly reemerged as a crisis point during the Cold War as a stage for military confrontation between the Communist PRC and the military alliance of the USA and Taiwanese Republic of China.



Taiwan's strategic importance is well demonstrated by the historic competition of regional powers for control over the island. Two regional hegemon – the Chinese and the Japanese empire, fought the First Sino-Japanese war for influence in East Asia. After its 1895 military defeat, China ceded control over Taiwan to Japan, resulting in a half-century long Japanese colonization of the island. Japanese management of the peripheral regions of its sphere of influence reflected a lasting concern with Taiwan's development as a complement to Japan. Not only did Japan's goals for Taiwan's economic growth utilize soft power strategies such as land reform, agricultural development to relieve the peasantry, provision of universal education, and introduction of agricultural associations, the remnants of Japanese colonization also left Taiwan with an efficient bureaucratic apparatus and foundations for subsequent growth (Amsden, 79-82). In conclusion, the Japanese effectively used soft power to minimize active Taiwanese nationalist resistance to the occupation.

The regional hegemonic conflict, however, continued militarily in the Second Sino-Japanese War as part of World War II. In accordance with the Chinese government's renunciation of all past treaties with Japan and demand for the return of all previously lost territories, Japan's military defeat empowered China to displace Japan as the regional hegemon and absorb Taiwan into its sphere of influence (BBC News, 2017).

Unfortunately for the Chinese, the geopolitics of the Cold War introduced to Asia Pacific the global dimension of the contest for spheres of influence. The historic competition for control over Taiwan was transformed into a Cold War conflict between Chinese Communism and American liberalism. As the Chinese Communist Party won the Chinese civil war, "Taiwan was



occupied by the vanquished Nationalist government in 1949 and the Guomindang was obsessed with one objective: military buildup in order to retake the Mainland” (Amsden, 78). As a refuge to CCP’s political, Taiwan became a disputed independent nation – the Republic of China. While it was now free of the regional hegemonic conflict between Japan and China, it found itself in a hostile region of Communist superpowers the USSR and the PRC. Because of its strategic and geopolitical importance, as well as because of the threat created by Guomindang government’s ideological opposition to Communism Taiwan became a target of both the PRC and USA, each wanting to incorporate it into its sphere of influence. This contest for Taiwan in 1950s clearly reflected the zero-sum approach to spheres of influence – the loss of Taiwan was simply unacceptable. Because of Taiwan’s sudden significance in the Cold War national interests of global powers, further conflict was unavoidable.

Finding itself in such a dangerous position, Taiwan desperately needed security from the PRC. In response to China’s vigorous propaganda for the ‘liberation of Taiwan’ and related military efforts to invade the offshore islands and eventually Taiwan, the island found protection in the U.S. sphere of influence. The resulting military conflict was facilitated by hard power utilized by both the PRC and USA in light of the Cold War urgency that dominated all policy-making.

First, the hard power strategy of Mao’s foreign policy stemmed from his “long-standing fear that a military confrontation with the United States was inevitable, and it could happen in three places: Korea, Indochina, and the Taiwan Strait” (Sheng, 483). Similarly, “the Eisenhower administration reluctantly signed a mutual defense treaty with Jiang Jieshi’s government [ROC],



hoping that would deter Beijing's aggression" (Sheng, 478), as well as passed the Formosa Resolution in the U.S. Congress that awarded the president full authority to protect Taiwan and related off-shore territories. (Sheng, 485).

Second, the PRC's military assertiveness reflected the perception of the struggle for Taiwan as an extension of the Chinese civil war, thus making Taiwan a vital national interest. Mao viewed Taiwan not as a sovereign state but a territory illegally governed by the opposition. This legitimized PRC's claim over Taiwan in the international community, especially the Eastern bloc, and had it not been for the U.S. support of Taiwan Mao would have intervened militarily. Simultaneously, the American Cold War hysteria fed the U.S. determination to militarily prevent any Communist advance. The U.S. government deployed nuclear weapons for protection of Taiwan, but unlike the PRC it also used soft power. For example, it initiated diplomatic efforts through Sweden, Britain, and India, as well as continued the policy of isolation and embargo against the PRC (Sheng, 481-486). Despite such efforts to coerce Beijing to enter international negotiations, PRC's military attacks on Jinmen and other islands, as well as ROC warships, proceeded in face of the U.S. commitment to military protection of Taiwan.

Another indicator of the inevitability of the Taiwan conflict is the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis. Despite the 1955 announcement by the top Chinese diplomat Zhou Enlai of Beijing's willingness to negotiate and the initiation of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks, conflict soon resurfaced. "Between the end of the first crisis and 1958, while the PRC was building up its military in the strait area, Washington was arming the ROC forces," (Sheng, 488). In addition to the continuation of hard power approach to the conflict, both the PRC and U.S. governments



expanded their strategies. Whereas Mao strengthened mass mobilization at home, the U.S. expanded its sphere of influence by committing itself to protection of additional offshore islands. Hence, the conflict over Taiwan's position in the Chinese or American sphere of influence could not be resolved neither through diplomatic nor military means. Especially influenced by the Cold War zero-sum sentiments and reliance on military power, armed conflict between the two powers remained the strategy of choice.

Even after the U.S. victory in the Cold War and Taiwan's permanent position in its sphere of influence, the island remained of primary importance in Beijing's foreign policy. Despite the dramatic change in the global political order after the end of the Cold War, the USA remained the regional hegemon in Asia Pacific. Its sphere of influence, however, has been challenged continuously by the PRC which has struggled to find its role in the region. In 1996, "as Taiwanese were readying to hold their country's first direct presidential election later in March, China flexed its military muscles by holding a series of military exercises and firing missiles..., causing a panic in Taiwan and prompting U.S. President William J. Clinton to deploy a carrier battle group to international waters near Taiwan" (Cole, 2). The PRC therefore still considers the reunification a matter of great national importance. Nevertheless, assuming direct control of the island militarily in the current global political order is unlikely. From the ideological perspective, the PRC strictly maintains its respect for national sovereignty in its foreign policy, primarily because the CCP is painfully aware of the international sanctions and isolation it would suffer in case of a military invasion. Furthermore, PRC's past use of military strategy has generally been counterproductive. The Chinese government has changed its strategy



accordingly, relying increasingly on soft power. While the showcase of its military might in the Strait of Taiwan revived the possibility of a military invasion, it primarily caused harm to Taiwan's economy by temporarily disrupting naval shipping and air transport. By thus using soft power through economic means, the PRC has since 1990s "attempted to win the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese through economic interdependence" (Cole, 2).

The position of Taiwan as a stage for hegemonic competition on both the regional and global scale clearly reflects the consequences of spheres of influence on regional stability. Independent from actors involved ranging from imperial Japan to the Clinton administration, and unrelated to employed strategies including soft power means of diplomacy or economic incentives and hard power means of military threats, the conflict in the Strait of Taiwan persisted for over a century.

Yugoslavia, too, was historically a region of common hegemonic conflict among great empires, such as the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian empire. It remained a relatively ignored region until the Cold War when the ideological tensions between the SFRY and USSR became apparent to the Western bloc and provided an opportunity for the extension of American influence to Eastern Europe. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia the contest for influence in the Balkans continued and has intensified in the 'New Cold War' with newly independent nations susceptible to external influence.

The competition for influence in Yugoslavia was an unconventional contest of the Cold War. Not only was the SFRY a state in the Eastern bloc, ideologically aligned with the USSR, and culturally interrelated with Slavic states, the USA showed little interest in the region until the



Tito-Stalin split explicitly demonstrated the opportunity for the USA to penetrate into the Soviet bloc. Yugoslavian non-alignment between the American and Soviet spheres of influence led to a contest between the two powers, which uncharacteristically for the Cold War manifested not in direct conflict between the USA and USSR, but rather in increasing tensions between Yugoslavia and the two powers. Additionally, resulting ideological and economic conflict substituted a military confrontation. While the use of soft power was certainly welcomed by the Yugoslavian government, the Yugoslavian Communist Party's disobedience of USSR's directives caused 'a Cold War within the Communist World'.

The Yugoslavian 'balancing act' among the U.S. sphere of influence, the Non-Alignment Movement, and the Soviet sphere of influence stemmed from Tito's determination to cultivate national autonomy. The SFRY's geopolitical significance was strategic, as it was located on the Mediterranean and could facilitate Soviet access to the region. Moreover, the U.S. saw the ideological role of the SFRY as an internationalist and cooperative alternative to Soviet style Communism. Initially, however, Yugoslavian relations with the USSR and its position in the Eastern bloc seemed undisputable, as the Yugoslavian Communist Party organized the country according to the Soviet Communist model and was ideologically committed to the advancement of Leninism. Not only did Tito's personal ties to Moscow and Soviet intelligence provide a fundamental fraternal connection with the Soviets, Belgrade was prior to the conflict the headquarters of the Cominform, an intra-governmental body that coordinated Communist Parties under Soviet direction. Only after the Yugoslavian government made it clear that it would not



sacrifice its autonomy to Moscow's leadership but rather pursue its own nationalist goals, did the USA act to advance its influence in the SFRY.

The so-called Tito-Stalin Split in 1948 occurred because of various disagreements, including Yugoslavian claims to Trieste and Albania, aid to Greek Communists, and economic policies such as the Five-Year Plan that aimed to strengthen Yugoslavian industry without the usual Soviet leadership in economic planning (Mehta, 108-109). After the 1948 Yugoslavian expulsion from the Cominform, such ideological disputes between the Soviet and Yugoslavian leadership often lead to overt conflict. "Tito's 'separate road' to socialism was a glaring deficiency in Stalin's claim to predominance over the satellite states" (Mehta, 115). Despite such a conflict, the possibility of military confrontation with the SFRY remained only a remote possibility due to the strength of the Yugoslavian People's Army and the Yugoslavian inevitable realignment with the West. Thus, the Soviets had no other choice then to utilize soft power through ideological and economic coercion.

The breakdown of economic relations between the SFRY and the USSR started in 1948 and was followed by economic sanctions imposed by the entire Soviet bloc that reduced bilateral trade and cut off Soviet technological aid, temporarily freezing Yugoslavian economy. Additionally, SFRY's reliance on Soviet energy imports including dependence on all coal and over half of oil imports from the USSR served as leverage that could be used to coerce Tito to follow Stalin's directives (A. Z., 40-41). On the ideological front, Stalin challenged Tito's Yugoslavia by suddenly supporting Bulgarian claims to territories in the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Bulgarian control over Macedonia or perhaps even an independent Macedonia



would undoubtedly replace Tito's influence with Cominform control (Mehta, 118). Furthermore, Moscow sponsored extensive anti-Yugoslav propaganda, utilizing any public displays of Tito's pro-Western stance to condemn him as an 'imperialist American puppet'. Such conflict continued until gradual rapprochement in late 1950s, "yet, the essence of the conflict remained constant: the struggle between a great, hegemonic national power and a small state sharply aware of its habitual jeopardy. Tito, understanding this reality, retreated pragmatically from the ideological dispute and continued to maintain firm bonds in interstate relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union" (Djilas, 17).

The uncharacteristically gentle approach to a contested sphere of influence during the Cold War was reciprocated by the West in the U.S. strategy to achieve policy goals outlined as "patience, [economic] aid and diplomacy, connecting Yugoslavia closer to the West and U.S., ... and promoting Yugoslavia's model as an example of a 'different' socialist country," as well as "leveraging Yugoslavia's influence in third world countries" (Orešković, 78). Hence, the USA primarily aimed to foster Yugoslavian neutrality and friendly relations. Its strategy relied on economic support to 'keep the SFRY afloat', including numerous initiatives such as economic and military aid, increased trade, credit and scientific cooperation, and the Friends for Yugoslavia initiative that resolved Yugoslavia's international debt. Furthermore, "U.S. arms shipments showed Yugoslavia that it was regarded as a security interest of the United States, worth expending resources to protect," (Mehta, 138). An even greater declaration of friendship was extending to Yugoslavia the status of a Most-Favored Nation 1962 in exchange for Tito's economic reform that opened up investment from Western Europe and the United States (Lampe,



102). An additional U.S. effort to weaken the Soviet ideological appeal was fostering personal relationships with the Yugoslavian leadership. Not only was personal diplomacy initiated by Tito well received in Washington and especially by president Kennedy, even in the 1970s Kissinger described his goals for Yugoslavia as “to weaken Soviet influence in Central Europe by presidential visits” (Orešković, 80). The Yugoslavian creation of the Non-Alignment Movement also received U.S. support because of its anti-colonial stance and support for territorial sovereignty – ideas that fundamentally fit the American sponsorship of democratic liberalism as the only credible ideology.

Despite the U.S. willingness to accommodate some Yugoslavian challenges such as human rights violations or even occasional rapprochement with Moscow, the relationship between the two states was severely strained by incidents such as the explicit accusation of CIA’s plot for the assassination of the Cypriot leader (Orešković, 89). The Yom Kippur War was another such challenge. Until 1974 the SFRY covertly supplied arms to Arab forces under the pretext of humanitarian aid, as well as participated in Soviet efforts to arm anti-Israeli forces (Orešković, 90). Still, the geopolitical significance of the SFRY prevented the USA from responding to such provocations too harshly. Instead, both the American and Yugoslavian governments avoided conflict as often as possible, rather engaging in periods of brief isolation from one another.

The ‘Yugoslavian balancing act’ was not rendered useless with the end of the Cold War. On the contrary, the dissolution of the USSR and SFRY created additional stakes to the pressing problem of influence in the Balkans in light of the changed geopolitical conditions in the region.



While Russia turned inwards to rebuild itself after the Soviet collapse and failed to preserve its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the U.S. led Western European alliance in the form of the European Union and NATO aimed to absorb the newly independent states of former Yugoslavia. A new challenge emerged as the ‘New Cold War’ in the 2000s, as Russian historic sphere of influence after liberation from the Soviet occupiers turned Westward for protection, integration, and prosperity. The Russian revival and increased aggression in Eastern Europe led to conflict aiming to challenge the new U.S. sphere of influence.

The dissolution of the SFRY in 1991 came after the emergence of economic, political, and ethnic difficulties that the country’s leadership successfully suppressed until Tito’s death, but reemerged as the Communist Party became increasingly dominated by Serbian nationalists. For almost a decade after the initial separation of Slovenia and Croatia, the majority of the former Yugoslavian territory remained engulfed in violent ethnic and nationalist conflict, out of which emerged a number of weak, unstable democracies. Most emancipated states found themselves independent for the first time in modern history, thus having little experience in governance and nation building. As such, democratic and economic guidance offered by the USA and Western Europe was welcomed openly in the Balkans, whereas Russia was late to renew its interest in the Balkans and only recently started to actively pursue influence in the region – now effectively in the U.S. sphere of influence. As a result, the contest between the American and Russian aspirations for the consolidation of their influence in the countries of former Yugoslavia continually produces conflict despite such a geopolitical transformation.



After the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the consequent war, the U.S. government actively supported the extension of its European sphere of influence to include the Balkans through soft power of international organizations such as the European Union, NATO, and the IMF. American goals in the region still primarily include expanding its influence by remodeling the newly independent states in its image – as liberal, capitalist democracies. The expansion of the European Union in particular, reflects the skilled U.S. use of legitimate international institutions in remodeling the Balkans. The EU’s “principle instruments ... are not force, but economic incentives and the power of attraction and seduction connected to its cultivation of the idea of Europe”(Browning, 108). Through initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighborhood Policy, pro-European sentiments are amplified, calling on any cultural and historic ties the Balkans have with Western Europe. The cultivation of a ‘ring of friends’ combined with the embrace of deep diplomacy to promote institutional reform and restructuring of economic, civic, cultural, and political institutions along neoliberal lines generates strong support for EU membership (Browning, 108-109). Subconsciously, however, such integration of the former SFRY states creates a cultural and ideological division between the European identity which is increasingly equated with their national identity, and the non-European identity associated particularly with Russia. Even in Serbia, the regional hegemon with strong pro-Russian attitudes, EU membership remains the top foreign policy goal with the majority of the population favoring it over rapprochement with Russia (Konitzer, 112).

In the economic arena, American efforts to expand their influence in the Balkans show to be much more successful than its ideological initiatives. The U.S.-supported institutions such as



the IMF play an important role in partnering with the newly independent states, aiding them in their economic, monetary, and fiscal reform, funding their foreign debt, and providing financing for economic development. Additionally, trade with the EU in all former SFRY countries far exceeds that with Russia, increasing the regional economic dependence on the West (Konitzer, 120).

The Russian pursuit of a sphere of influence in the Balkans intensified as the ‘New Cold War’ was catalyzed in Georgia in 2008 and Russia actively began to challenge the U.S. sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. The newly invigorated Russian foreign policy targeted not only the past Soviet Republics, but focused specifically on former SFRY states. In doing so, Russian leadership with the new sense of urgency supplemented soft power strategies of ideological and economic influence with a harsher approach. While refraining from military action, Russian hard power in the Balkans includes military relations with Serbia and even an attempt at a governmental overthrow in Montenegro. “For Russia, this is really a battleground—a place where Russia can influence countries” (Garčević, 2017).

Russian traditionally soft power in the Balkans certainly has stronger historic and cultural foundations in the region when compared to the American or West European influences. One important strategy of weakening the existing U.S. influence was Russian emphasis of the “consistent historical friendship and a sense of pan-Slavic ‘brotherhood’ (bratstvo) between Serbia and Russia” (Konitzer, 108). The propaganda of “Russia as the bastion of true Europe, the protector of true European values of sovereignty in contrast to the degenerative and immoral postmodernising EU,” (Browning, 111) was thus effective mostly in Serbia. Russia relies mainly



on Serbia to extend Moscow's influence to the Balkans. Still, the Serbian population remains torn between fully assuming the European identity and turning to their Slavic roots in pursuit of strong relations with Russia. The close friendship is reflected particularly in Russian soft power strategy of support for Serbian claims to Kosovo and in the strategy of gas diplomacy that benefits Serbia greatly. With regards to Kosovo, Russia pledged that "in defense of Kosovo, we'll stand fast as we did at Stalingrad," (Konitzer, 113). Furthermore, its UN Security Council's vetoes of resolutions concerning Kosovo's independence and the policy of non-recognition serve as a great favor, yet leverage over the Serbian government.

Unlike the pro-Russian sentiments in Serbia and the resulting identity crisis, some former SFRY states prioritize their affinity for a European identity. In Montenegro, the Russian-sponsored coup attempt organized in collaboration with Serbian nationalists and the Orthodox church institutions aimed to overthrow the pro-Western government which not only rejected Russian appeals for privileged access to Montenegrin Adriatic Sea ports in 2013, but also joined NATO in July 2017. The "coup last fall would have overthrown the nation's pro-West government, brought the pro-Russia opposition to power, and thwarted Montenegro's bid to become part of NATO and eventually the European Union" (Friedman, 2017). While the takeover of the Montenegrin Parliament building and the assassination of the Đukanović, Montenegro's former prime minister, were prevented, the extreme measures that the Russian government was willing to take highlight its resolve to maintain a sphere of influence in the West Balkans at whatever costs.



The persistence of the competition between Moscow and Washington for influence in the West Balkans clearly reflects the instability that spheres of influence generate. Not only did the consolidated Soviet sphere of influence invite U.S. challenges during the Cold War, even Russia's loss of all but a handful of allies in the former Yugoslavia after 1991 intensified its efforts to dominate the region. Thus, no matter how the geopolitical conditions of a region change or how turbulent the global position of a great power, the pursuit of spheres of influence remains a crucial foreign policy tool.

In conclusion, spheres of influence continually produce conflict despite spatial and temporal variations. As great powers infringe on sovereignty of geopolitically significant nation states, they contest other global powers or even the international community. Resulting conflict causes tensions regionally and globally, as well as affects the future global order for years to come. This is particularly evident in ways in which the Cold War antagonism of Communism and liberalism influenced policy-making throughout the 20th century, and as a historic legacy continues to influence modern governance. Conflicts in Taiwan and present day West Balkans indicate how such pursuit of spheres of influence by great powers inevitably leads to conflict, may it be in the form of an ideological dispute, economic warfare, or direct military confrontation. As a result of the ever-present expansionist worldview of global superpowers, the 'balancing act' of smaller states remains the only source of maintaining national sovereignty. "In time of peace, even the great powers will tolerate such policies. But when global equilibrium itself is eroded by the disorders of expansionism, such a balancing act exposes itself to risks,



which in turn increase the vulnerability of whatever internal stability exists” (Djilas, 25). Thus, spheres of influence inevitably coincide with spheres of conflict.

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