



Croatian
International
Relations
Review

—
CIRR

—
XXVI (87) 2020,
120-144

—
DOI 10.37173/
cirr.26.87.5

—
UDC 341.3:355.71:327

The Significance of Foreign Military Bases as Instruments of Spheres of Influence

—
Tomasz Klin

University of Wrocław, Poland

tomasz.klin@uwr.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-8630-4659

Abstract

Key words:

*Spheres of Influence;
Great Power Rivalry;
Foreign Military
Bases; Globalisation*

The category of the sphere of influence can explain some contemporary international processes. To define that category, however, much stress is laid on great powers' exclusivity within their spheres of influence. The author takes into consideration the thesis of the aforementioned exclusivity's erosion. Because foreign military bases are essential instruments of spheres of influence due to their strong impact on security policy, it is worth investigating their presence in this context. Specifically, the author carries out an in-depth study of military bases of more than one major power in one host country. Further, the article discusses the extent to which the gradual erosion of exclusivity undermines the significance of spheres of influence as such. In conclusion, the author states that the case of Djibouti undermines the idea of great power exclusivity. Yet, other cases do not provide sufficient evidence on such deep transformation because of either limited periods of bases' existence or great power cooperative attitudes.

Introduction

For a long time, spheres of influence have caught the close attention of International Relations (IR) scholars. The issue focuses on geopolitical regions with special and dominant involvement of a given major power. However, after the Cold War, spheres of influence ceased to be relevant as the IR theoretical category. The notion survived in the ordinary discourse and is quite commonly used by political practitioners and journalists. This use seldom results from in-depth considerations of what criteria a phenomenon should fulfil to be called a “sphere of influence”. Nevertheless, it is commonly accepted that spheres of influence clearly link with security issues. On the global scale, political power has been usually exercised by armed forces or at least with some military support. Foreign military bases serve well for such purposes. For instance, occupations require permanent basing. Also, military interventions are feasible through bases in adjacent countries, and — if protracted — interventions need basing in a target-country. Basing became an important element of strategic presence abroad. Even declared projects of new bases or suspicions of adversary’s plans trigger discursive actions such as warnings or condemnations. In sum, foreign military bases clearly link with the problematic of the spheres of influence as essential instruments of exercising power.

The article researches the question of whether contemporary foreign military bases still serve as crucial components of spheres of influence which result from mutually recognised responsibilities, or if basing leads to major power rivalry which undermines spheres of influence or intends to shift their boundaries. The method of this article consists in studying countries hosting military bases of more than one major power on their territories as a possible indicator of the erosion of superordinate powers’ monopoly. Rivalry, cooperation or mutual ignorance become a second-rank variable which explains the context. Regardless of the conditions explored in this article, the erosion of major powers’ monopoly would undermine the whole idea of spheres of influence.

The article proceeds as follows: the first part is theoretical and aims to conceptualise spheres of influence and foreign military bases and their relations. Specifically, it provides the reader with the definition of spheres of influence framed within the

category of international hierarchy. As a result, the history of spheres of influence can be analysed, and here an important aspect regards the role of military presence. The first part also considers how foreign military bases contribute to exploring the contemporary transformation of spheres of influence. The second part of the article analyses countries hosting major powers' military bases on their territories. This analysis aims to detect circumstances in which two or three major powers installed military bases or facilities in similar locations. An important purpose of this part is to address the rivalry/cooperation nexus regarding major powers' involvement. In conclusions, the article summarises its contribution and considers some further research paths.

Understanding relations between spheres of influence and foreign military bases

The ongoing era, called simply the post-Cold War period, seems to be reach in various phenomena associated with the issue of spheres of influence including military interventions and occupations, establishment and maintenance of foreign military bases, trade agreements, expansion of investment and aid. The notion "spheres of influence" commonly appears in public discourse but is seldom theorised (Hast 2014: vii; Jackson 2020: 255). Moreover, political practitioners often use its too broad meanings. This results from a moral evaluation embodied in notions. In the case of spheres of influence, their notional use serves to accuse great powers of immoral practices. The notion is also useful for a simplified description of complex international affairs. The most striking in the contemporary era is how pejorative and normative the notion is. The meaning of spheres of influence undergoes changes not only by real political interactions but discursively: behind the spheres, there are judgements and power, interrelated. This encourages accusations of the stronger actors (Jackson 2020: 256-257), denials (Hast 2014: 4-6) or excuses, which are typical reactions to accusations. The pejorative use of spheres of influence does not exhaust their normative foundations: the spheres can contribute to the international order by stability, limiting great power conflicts and lesser powers' conflicts within a given area. The spheres can also raise constant expectations between great powers and between subordinates and their hegemon (Bryła 2002: 162, 170). However, a positive or negative evaluation of

spheres of influence is a highly subjective and contextual issue, and usually a consequence of ideological preferences.

Fortunately, it is still conceivable to create an acceptable definition of spheres of influence. The analysis of the category of spheres of influence implies they contain the following elements: first, they cover certain geographic units of relatively coherent characteristics such as regions or subregions. Second, the presence of great or major power is indispensable. Third, the spheres are grounded in some relations of subordination or dominant external influence that questions full territorial sovereignty of lesser powers. And fourth, the spheres are founded on the exclusion of other external powers (Jackson 2020: 255), which means formal or informal recognition of other great powers of such a state. Thus, the reflection on the spheres of influence in the post-Cold War must consist in verifying the presence of the above-mentioned elements. Three former of these elements are observable; what is debatable, however, is the extent of their presence and functioning, and whether they are still common. Nevertheless, the main direction of criticism heads for the fourth element, namely “exclusivity/monopoly” of a given great power’s influence. If this article can demonstrate a lack of such exclusivity, it would also undermine the existence of firm spheres of influence.

The legitimacy of subordination is also important as a component of spheres of influence (Lake 2009: 21-22). The general mechanism of authority on the international arena basically does not differ from intrastate authority. Scholars’ growing attention to the issue of international authority resulted in fruitful intellectual contribution (Cooley 2005; Fearon and Laitin 2004; Hurd 1999; Kreuder-Sonnen 2019; Lake 2007, 2017; Voelsen and Schettler 2019; Zürn, Binder and Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012); nevertheless, it is still contested and replaced by a less controversial category of hegemony. A hegemon not only coerces subordinates but alters their agenda of policy options by his/her own presence and size (Destradi 2010; Ikenberry and Nexon 2019; Lanoszka 2013; Nexon and Neumann 2018; Prys 2010; Saull 2012). Some scholars add that shared beliefs on hegemony pose an important intervening variable (Jerdén 2017). In general, analytical approaches differ in explanations by using various material/ideational factors and causation/constitution (Jackson 2020).

Historically, military and economic powers have played a decisive role in obtaining and maintaining spheres of influence, and the former is most important. It is inconceivable to expand spheres of influence without military instruments. The question arises: Which military indicators can serve best and which are irrelevant to gain knowledge on reshaping of the spheres of influence? As scholars noted, nuclear weapons themselves do not create great powerhood, because they cannot alter economic foundations of power (Waltz 1979, 180-181), threats of the use of nuclear weapons against a lesser power proved ineffective; therefore, they are indifferent to create a sphere of influence. Likewise, the size and technological advancement of conventional armed forces do not play a serious role: there existed strong but isolated states in history. A more relevant indicator seems to be military bases out of a given great power's territory.

A military base is defined as an extraterritorial unit with an external actor's sovereign or semi-sovereign rights. For the last decades, numerous installations called military facilities which serve similar functions but lack this extraordinary status have also been established (Harkavy 1989: 7-8). Basing became particularly important in the Cold War era. Bases served as tools of deterrence, potential offensive, and for the pacification of the host country's revolution. Scholars observe the changing functions of basing throughout the last century. Before World War II external basing seldom occurred in sovereign states. Preponderant military powers preferred occupations or colonial acquisitions in which bases aimed to prevent rebellions. The norm undermining sovereignty gradually changed after the war when more mutual agreements indicated the status of bases. Still, most of them were related to occupations and post-colonial influences (Schmidt 2014, 2020). Post-Cold War basing results even more from contracts, not coercive power. Single installations like the US Guantanamo base, occupied despite the Cuban objections, became curious relics (Schmidt 2020).

Great powers' conflicts, rivalry and cooperation have taken place throughout history but resulted from various modes of expansion and different instruments of power (Ó Tuathail 2002: 178). Also, spheres of influence can be analysed by numerous dimensions and features. The spheres are controlled by superordinates whose power could vary, and the relations

between superordinates also vary across international systems. It is particularly interesting which of superordinates approve and which contest adversary's monopoly within the spheres. Another dimension embraces causality: how major powers created and maintained their spheres of influence. And then consequently, what patterns of relations constrained subordinates' freedom. Another dimension regards the geography of spheres, and here there appear two important aspects: the scale of spheres and their boundaries. Further, the spheres were or have existed for some time: how long is another telling feature that sheds light on the stability of international order. Finally, the spheres have undergone changes at the beginning, but also in further stages of their existence. Directions in which they have headed for seem to be important too. The dimensions are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1.
Major features
of spheres of
influence across
three eras

Dimensions and features of spheres of influence	Advanced colonialism	Cold War	post-Cold War
Superordinate's power	Increasingly centralised	Highly/medium centralised	Less centralised
Contesting monopoly by other major powers	Incidental contest by rising powers	Declared contest by other major powers	Rising disagreements over the monopoly?
Main instruments of expansion and maintenance of spheres of influence	Military forces and diplomacy	Ideology, military intervention or assistance, economic assistance, diplomacy	Military interventions, armed assistance, economic aid
Subordinates' sovereignty	None or strongly restricted	Formal; restricted both "Westphalian" and domestic sovereignty	Formal; constraints of both "Westphalian" and domestic sovereignty
Size/scale	Large-scale, often subcontinental	Multiple scales	Medium-scale (individual countries) and small-scale (parts of countries)

Dimensions and features of spheres of influence	Advanced colonialism	Cold War	post-Cold War
Boundaries	Delimitation without demarcation	Strict, often militarised borders	A tendency to overlap with state or quasi-state borders
Time	Decades	Decades	Differentiated periods
Direction of changes	Multiple powers' expansion (win-win); zero-sum since WWI	Zero-sum	Shrinking and eroding?

Table 1 contrasts three eras: advanced colonialism of the industrial era approximately of the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries; the bipolar Cold War system; and the contemporary era after the fall of communism. Advanced colonial powers tended to gradually centralise their power and create empires. By contrast, the Cold War system saw informal empires rather than highly centralised ones. This was a process, too: the Soviet system was initially centralised, but after Stalin had died, even the USSR lost interest in complete control over its subordinates. It is uneasy to find a brief and accurate description of the post-Cold War period; nonetheless, a gradual decentralisation has been demonstrated. For instance, the US arms industry has dragged companies from multiple countries into a long-term collaboration. This, in turn, partially dispersed responsibilities for the production of key weapons. Another example regards friendly regimes of the USA, Russia or France that have had fewer limits in foreign policy than in the previous eras. A clear example is Iraq, whose Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki opened the country to Iranian influences, despite complete dependence on the US military support (Chulov 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the monopoly of one major power was seldom contested by other major powers in the previous eras. In the advanced colonial period, some rising powers declared objections, yet their primary goal was to sign new, more favourable agreements. In the post-World War II system, the

superpowers largely applied the rule of implicit acceptance of spheres. The post-Cold War era seems to be more troubling for accurate description. Apparently, the expansion of trade agreements effectively undermines any major power's monopoly. Yet the security domain does not exert such effects. Indeed, it is too early at this stage of the study to give a clear answer to major powers' attitudes to adversary's monopoly.

The next dimension regards major instruments of expansion and maintenance of spheres, and this does not create serious controversy: advanced colonialism saw conquest by military and diplomatic tools; the Cold War superpowers also acted by ideology, and military and economic support for friendly regimes; major powers after the fall of communism had to be more attractive to lesser powers, which required large-scale military and economic assistance, which in turn encouraged investment and opened markets for trade. For subordinates who needed security assistance, hosting powerful allies' military bases has been more important than trade. And still, military interventions of major powers resulted in subordination such as Iraq in 2003 and Mali in 2012.

A more challenging issue is subordinates' freedom of action in spheres of influence. A starting point can be Stephen Krasner's (1999: 11-25) typology of sovereignty that points out four types of which three are interrelated with the spheres of influence: domestic which regards the organisation of the authority; international legal that can be called formal which embraces legal rights and duties in the international society; and "Westphalian" based on territoriality and the exclusion of external political superordination. Advanced colonialism transformed the status of subordinated units into semi- or non-sovereign regarding all three types. The subordinates in the Cold War, by contrast, preserved basic formal sovereignty and simultaneously had rather limited freedom of the domestic organisation through ideological interferences and external political superordination. In the Cold War, military bases contributed to subordinates' constraints. As for the newest period, formal sovereignty gained even more interest and support, whereas the domestic and external political freedoms at first glance have been less constrained and highly differentiated. For instance, the establishment of foreign military bases more often resulted from bilateral contracts.

The next two aspects regard geographic issues: the scale and boundaries of spheres of influence. It is observable that the spheres are smaller than in the two previous periods. The areas of special and uncontested interests of the US, France and Russia shrank in the 1990s. Any expansion succeeded in the protection of quasi-states like South Ossetia or single medium-sized states such as Iraq. Some great powers organised large-scale regional conferences that resulted in economic cooperation, such as China-Africa, Russia-Africa or China-Central and Eastern European countries. Nevertheless, these regions do not meet criteria of spheres of influence but are targets of great power *rivalry* for economic interests. As for boundaries, the post-Cold War era differs from the Cold War because of promoting demilitarisation of borders. However, if there have existed spheres of influence after the fall of communism, usually they have overlapped with state borders. The most important counterexample is Syria which experienced intrastate division of major powers' armed responsibility. Another counterexample is Ukraine. In this case, however, great powers openly disagree over adversary's monopoly and compete over influences.

The next dimension is the time which shows the stability of the orders based on spheres of influence. In the advanced colonial era and in the Cold War, spheres of influence, once established, survived for decades. Obviously, there were single changes: for instance, the Soviet Union withdrew from Austria in 1955 and entered Cuba in 1960. But this was incomparable with the post-Cold War era, in which the stability of spheres of influence is discernible only in some countries such as Belarus or Colombia. A superficial observation shows numerous changes: the United States entered some Central Asian countries and then had to withdraw. Many Latin American states had temporarily anti-US governments after the Left had won elections. The cases of Ukraine and Georgia demonstrate the intense Russian-Western rivalry rather than the stability of external influences. Also, France resigned from military support for some African governments against domestic threats: there was a telling case of Central African Republic in 2013 when France did not defy a victorious rebellion (Darracq 2014). In sum, the subordination of states in the post-Cold War period seems to be more chaotic, not as long-term as in the previous two eras.

The last dimension regards expansion and related directions of changes. The most expansive period was the advanced

colonial era called the “scramble” for Africa. Still, the exhaustion of major powers’ resources in World War I limited expansionism and introduced the zero-sum rule: if one major power obtained new areas, another one lost them. However, the British withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1919 could be an interesting counterexample. In the Cold War, the zero-sum rule basically remained. It was the most challenging part of Table 1 to define the pattern regarding the expansion of the spheres of influence after the fall of communism. As mentioned earlier, major powers lost decisive control over numerous countries because there has been much more rivalry. Admittedly, great powers took expansionist actions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Georgia, Ukraine and many more, but on the whole, the existing spheres shrank in the 1990s. China, as a new potential candidate for a superordinate, has been gradually expanding its influences onto all the continents. But so far neither area has been subordinated by China and uncontested by other great powers. This embraces Central Asia, large parts of Africa or Latin America. Thus China is a more effective rival that aims at obtaining advantage rather than dominant control.

Contemporary foreign military bases as elements of major power rivalry

The issue of military bases receives closer attention of the public, particularly after incidents with local residents (Yeo 2009). A foreign base is a hardly definable phenomenon: the United States itself possesses installations of various size, functions and status in approximately 70 countries. The US military has not presented any specific definition of a military base, because it also controls small premises such as repair facilities (Vine 2015: 3-4). Moreover, it is difficult to determine the bases of “strategic” value precisely. This can be carried out according to qualitative studies and scholarly intuition. Indeed, the first criterion should be durability—provisional outposts that serve for international missions do not catch the full attention of competing powers. Other criteria consider size, the number of troops, and the quality of weaponry located in a base: bases with combat aircraft or long-range radar stations are among those urging adversary’s military planners to take them into account.

The most striking case which supports the thesis of the erosion

of the spheres of influence is Djibouti. French soldiers appeared first in that country in the colonial era. France quickly noticed its strategic location close to the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, the southern entrance to the Red Sea. While gradually transferring competencies to the local residents until 1977, the French were constructing a multifaceted military base for land army, navy and air force. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States looked for establishing a new base close to the Horn of Africa, and a former site Camp Lemonnier fulfilled the criteria. The USA wanted to control both the Arabian Peninsula area, notably Yemen, and a part of Africa such as Sudan and Somalia. The location gained special significance due to the rapid increase of piracy near the Horn of Africa and thus proved its military value (Melvin 2019: 1-2). In 2011, counter-piracy campaigns brought Japan to adjust its law and install its first overseas military base after World War II in Djibouti (Melvin 2019: 10). Also, select European powers have established small military outposts in Djibouti due to their campaigns against piracy. Nonetheless, until that moment, this multinational military presence could not serve as an argument that the spheres of influence were challenged since all these states belonged to alliances led by the USA. Even incidental presence of the navy of South Korea or Saudi Arabia in Djibouti's civilian facilities does not undermine the US hegemony in the counter-piracy campaign (Vertin 2019: 12, 15).

A significant change started recently: since 2017, Djibouti has hosted China's multitask military base for 20 million USD annually. The Chinese forces have participated in peacekeeping and anti-piracy missions for over a decade (Melvin 2019: 3-5). However, a final establishment of a permanent base seems to be a serious transformation. On the one hand, Chinese officials call the installation "a strategic strong point" (quoted in Melvin 2019: 3), but on the other, they downplay the "hard security" perspective by emphasising that their facility serves as logistical support for escort missions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China 2016; Headley 2018). Still, the opening ceremony of the base in 2017 was performed with armoured vehicles and hundreds of soldiers (Bearak 2019), and analysts claim the construction contains large underground structures (Headley 2018). Despite common enemies: pirates and terrorists, China and the USA publicly accused one another of using Djibouti bases for geopolitical rivalry and even hostile

actions such as blinding American pilots by Chinese lasers (Browne 2018). This discourse demonstrates military rivalry is now present in one small country, which challenges the idea of spheres of influence comparable with the Cold War era. However, the exclusion of non-Chinese major powers is possible in the nearest future. Djibouti's officials admitted that the size of their public debt towards China was over 70% of the country's GDP, but they needed China's investment to develop infrastructure. Thus, an essential part of the Djiboutian-Chinese agreement is a new railway line and facilities in the civilian seaport near the base (Bearak 2019). The entire investment should be worth \$590 million (Vertin 2019: 12). Some US intellectuals started to consider China's economic ties with Djibouti as a potential tool against the United States, and they suggest to move the US base to another country. Barbera port in Somaliland is taken into consideration. The United States has not recognized Somaliland, but, as suggested, de facto military cooperation does not require formal recognition (Rubin 2019), and the United Arab Emirates has already located bases in Somaliland without the recognition (Vertin 2019: 2-6). This thinking follows the patterns of exclusivity in spheres of influence, and the US removal would become serious evidence for that.

Another case explored in this study is Syria. For over half of the decade it has served as a battleground in proxy wars of regional and global powers. A typical civil war quickly transformed into a mixed conflict with various political groups' armed forces supported by stronger external patrons. The illegality of armed support for rebel groups constrained data sharing by governments; therefore, scholars have to rely on media releases in order to analyse the Syrian conflict. As for the type of support, for years the dominant coverage said that patrons had trained and equipped their favourite armed groups. The only installation called a military base was the Russian naval facility in Tartus which had limited personnel and was seldom used before the Syrian War. In 2008 the facility gained a more substantial interest of the Russian authorities in the context of worsening relations with the West due to the Russo-Georgian War (Macleod 2008). Throughout the Syrian War Russia was increasing the facility's use, although its port was unprepared to serve a medium-sized naval group until 2017. Then Russia signed a 49-year agreement with Syria, under which an extended terrain obtained extraterritorial status with the right to receive forces without additional permission of the Syrian

government. The port can now support eleven vessels at once, and there have been plans to construct a shipyard (Russian Naval Base at Tartus n/d.). In 2015 Russia officially started a full-scale military intervention to support Bashar Assad by sending and using all the military branches including ground and air forces, many of them located in Syrian bases other than Tartus (Snyder 2015). It turned out Russia could not accept any result of the war that would weaken the most pro-Russian regime in the Middle East. But the United States also installed a military base in Syria near the border with Jordan and Iraq, which aimed at facilitating combat against the Islamic State in eastern Syria. The USA then further established several posts in north-east Syria to protect their pro-democratic, partially Kurdish ally Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The USA acted without any serious legal basis and aimed at numerous objectives including destroying the Islamic State, protecting borderlands around Iraq, and certainly also disturbing the attempt of Assad's forces to retake full territorial control.

Any explanation of the events of 2015-2020 in Syria needs to include great power rivalry. For instance, Russian officials openly accused the USA of illegal military presence. There was also a serious battle incident between the US forces and Russian mercenaries called the Wagner group. The Turkish army also intervened in Syria in 2016 and again in 2019. However, rivalry cannot explain all the aspects of relations between major powers in Syria. Until 2011 Syria was a pro-Russian regime, which was reflected mainly in weaponry purchases and the small naval post in Tartus. At the beginning of the Civil War, regional actors challenged Syria's pro-Russian status, making Syria a battleground. Russia's full intervention in 2015 was decisive for the outcome of the war: Assad's regime gradually retook territorial control, and as of 2020 nothing indicates any armed group could overthrow it.

Syria does not entirely fit into the category of the spheres of influence; nonetheless, Russia, the USA and Turkey repeatedly delimited provisional zones of their exclusive control. Turkey seized the Afrin province in 2016, and Rojava in late 2019 (Burc 2019). The most famous example of the mutually recognised boundary was the so-called deconfliction line between Russian-backed Assad forces and US-supported anti-Assad coalition (Starr and Browne 2018). However, the local monopoly on military presence was neither permanent nor unquestioned.

The battle between the US army and Wagner group in 2018 might suggest that Russia tested the US zone, although Russian officials denied they had known of the clashes in that area (Schmitt, Nechepurenko and Chivers 2018). Furthermore, the USA intentionally established military posts in north-east Syria to protect SDF, particularly against Turkey, which accused the Kurds of terrorist actions on Turkey's territory. The character of spatial divisions of power in Syria provides the scholarly community with important knowledge on the ongoing great power rivalry. Great powers and medium powers do not hesitate to use armed forces against one another. The US president Trump's announcement to abandon Syria in late 2019, which encouraged Turkey to attack the Kurds and extend its buffer zone, cannot be interpreted as a final withdrawal from the rivalry over Syria because practically the US troops remained and media reveal serious military incidents with the Russian military (Syria war: US deploys reinforcements to Syria after Russia clashes 2020). Exclusive zones did not disappear since the Turkish forces still occupy the northern part of Syria as of late 2020. Interestingly, the Kurds cooperated with Assad's forces and Russia to avoid the Turkish occupation of the whole Rojava province. Assad and Russia have not permitted Turkey to enter these areas. Certain spatial exclusivity persisted. Still, this is indecisive in terms of a permanent sphere of influence due to dynamism of three major powers' military presence in Syria.

In 2019 media released information on an unofficial military base of China in Tajikistan, which is the third interesting case for how military bases reflect the patterns of spheres of influence. Even though the Chinese government denied their army's base in Tajikistan, the sources include interviews with local residents and the analyses of pictures. The post is large enough to maintain dozens, perhaps even hundreds of soldiers. The location of the mysterious military base is adjacent to the Chinese border and the Afghani border, near the Wakhan Corridor which is an elongated part of Afghanistan's territory with a loose connection with the rest of that country's affairs (Shih 2019). The sources are reliable; therefore, the Chinese post needs consideration framed in the problematic of the spheres of influence. The obvious purpose of the base seems to be the prevention and detection of cross-border smuggling and illegal movement of people, including terrorists or potential Uighur rebels. The geographic conditions of that area imply a much more effective control near the Wakhan Corridor than typical

border control in China because crossing the Corridor brings easier access to the Chinese territory. As for the great power rivalry, two points can be considered. First, the location in Tajikistan somehow undermines Russia's sphere of influence in that country. Nonetheless, Tajikistan's territory is quite large and elongated, Russian bases are situated in the West, and the location of the Chinese base near China's border can be interpreted as not competitive to Russia. Second, China could construct the outpost in the Afghan part of the Corridor. Why it did not is an interesting question. Either China wanted not to collide its security interests with the USA in Afghanistan, or the Chinese government just ignored that option. However, the Chinese soldiers may have entered the Afghan territory anyway, because members of a Himalayan expedition in Wakhan Corridor released they had been interrogated by the Chinese soldiers there. The US officials also declared their awareness of the Chinese security operations in that location, which, interestingly, they had not objected to (Shih 2019). It is too early to form any conclusion regarding the Chinese, US and Russian mutual relations in the borderland of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. At present they do not indicate any agreement on adversary's monopoly on the whole territory.

For over a decade some media have claimed both Russia and India had located their military bases in Tajikistan. A careful study brings a different picture, though. Indian companies had modernised airports in Ayni and Farkhor. However, in the former, India's armed forces were not allowed to quarter at all, and in the latter, Indian aircraft were based only periodically (Putz 2015). The issue of the Indian air force in Tajikistan attracted attention, particularly in the context of "China's encirclement by India" (Scott 2008: 8-9). The facts might be portrayed as "a circle" on a map, but the real actions of India in Tajikistan and other locations were quite limited. From the perspective of this analysis, Tajikistan seems to be a mixed example of the logic of spheres of influence, because, on the one hand, India did not locate there its substantial military for permanent use, but on the other hand, Russia has not revealed any objection to the unofficial Chinese base.

Other cases, however, do not provide solid evidence for a compelling argument against great power exclusivity of influences in one country. Kyrgyzstan has hosted substantial Russian armed forces after the disintegration of the Soviet

Union. After the 9/11 attacks, the US military established a base in Manas which served until 2014 (Manas International Airport n/d.; Kyrgyz MPs vote to shut US base 2009). Soon after the 9/11, the United States and Russia improved their relations. But they worsened again very quickly when the USA started open preparations for invasion on Iraq. Russian diplomacy did not support the US military presence in Central Asia, although it openly started hostile actions about a decade later. In 2013 the pro-Russian President of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev influenced the parliament to finish its allowance for hosting the US military (Manas International Airport n/d.; Kyrgyz MPs vote to shut US base, 2009). In such circumstances a 13-year long US-Russian military co-existence in Kyrgyzstan reached its end, thus demonstrating that Russia lost monopolist control over security issues in Kyrgyzstan only for some time, and later regained it as its sphere of influence.

As mentioned earlier, in our era, states tend to limit the establishments of new permanent extraterritorial military bases. They prefer to alter the geostrategic situation by less eye-catching means. A great contributor to this phenomenon is China, for years accused of building a net of military bases called “String of Pearls” strategy. Careful analyses hardly confirm these allegations. Chinese companies constructed or repaired some facilities in seaports of Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, which are in use by commercial fleets (Marantidou 2014: 6-8). The obvious purpose is the improvement of conditions for commercial trade in the region of the Indian Ocean. China’s rivals, however, perceive this as a potential security challenge. The question arises: Whether and how China could transform these objects into permanent naval military bases? It is beyond discussion that China has financial arguments for effective persuasion, but permanent positioning in seaports requires official bilateral agreements that would be commonly commented in public. The practice of anti-piracy operations has proven that China can use friendly countries’ seaports for logistical purposes (Marantidou 2014: 12). Since the rational method is achieving goals at the lowest possible cost, in this case, permanent military presence certainly will not be required in the nearest future.

Vietnam is another case of multiple great powers’ military presence. Russia withdrew its military base in 2002. However, it officially considers a return (Russia ‘considering military bases

in Cuba and Vietnam' 2016). Moreover, some sources indicate the Russian personnel, uncertain if military or civilian but linked with the military, have been present for recent years in the same location of Cam Ranh (Grossman and Huynh 2019). Vietnam also accepts joint naval exercises and visits of combat ships of the United States and India. Apparently, an Indian military post in southern Vietnam is under consideration (Indian Naval Base in Vietnam at Cam Ranh Port to Protect Hanoi's Economic and Territorial Interest 2018). Vietnam's official defence policy excludes defence pacts and foreign military bases (Grossman and Huynh 2019). Nevertheless, in front of China's expansion on the South China Sea, Vietnam does not want to preserve neutrality. Official opening of external states' bases would be indeed perceived provoking for China and the domestic audience. What might be expected in the nearest future is the unofficial opening of small posts with civilian personnel for the USA and India for naval logistical support, without any official extraterritorial bases. Hitherto nothing clearly undermines the idea of an exclusive sphere of any great power in Vietnam, but the situation is dynamic. As long as China avoids confrontational policy resulting in Sino-Vietnamese incidents on the South China Sea, Vietnam remains satisfied with limited military cooperation with India and the USA.

The case of Oman suggests a limited analogy to Vietnam. Some sources allege that India constructed its own net of listening posts around the Indian Ocean, and one of them located in Oman (Manthan 2012: 152-153). Their presence and status cannot be easily verified because India eschews official statements. If the installation in Oman really is a military base and not just a small intelligence post, then Oman hosts two great powers: India and the USA at once. In this case, the problem with the verification of data does not allow to draw a final conclusion. Besides, the case of Oman regards the USA and India, which before a decade abandoned bilateral rivalry for cooperation in selected domains.

Another aspect of (the lack of) exclusivity regards medium or regional powers' rivalry. The press claimed that Israel and Iran at once had military bases in Eritrea (Pfeffer 2012), but it took place for a limited time. Later Saudi Arabia created effective pressure on Eritrea to join the anti-Houthi coalition in Yemen and thus cut security ties with Iran who allegedly is Houthi's patron (Ahmad 2017). Another case of consideration can be

Table 2.
Regional
distribution of
countries hosting
competing major
powers' military
bases

Regions	Host countries	External major powers	Major powers' attitude towards adversaries' bases
Horn of Africa	Djibouti	China; France; the USA	Sino-US rivalry and diplomatic conflict
	Eritrea	Iran*; Israel	Unknown
Middle East	Syria**	Russia, Turkey; the USA	Rivalry, proxy armed conflict, limited skirmishes
	Oman	India***; the USA	Unknown
Central Asia	Tajikistan	China; India****; Russia	Mutual ignorance
	Kyrgyzstan	Russia; the USA*****	Russia's open contest
Southeast Asia	Vietnam	India*****, Russia*****	—

* Terminated certainly in 2015.

** Multiple bases, movements of troops.

*** Intelligence post, details unknown.

**** Temporary use of a modernised airport.

***** 2004-2014.

***** Navy's permanent access to a seaport, no permanent personnel.

***** Limited personnel of unknown status.

As Table 2 summarises, there have been several locations of more than one major power's military in the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Among them, two are examples of rivalry: Djibouti and Syria, the third: Kyrgyzstan in which Russia effectively won rivalry. However, the analysis of countries that host superordinate powers' military facilities proves that there still exist numerous areas detached from great power rivalry. The United States commands dozens of military bases in NATO countries, Australia, Japan, South Korea and Israel, among others. Russia exclusively has military facilities in Armenia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (Dyner 2020). China has maintained some military presence in Myanmar,

although apparently not a permanent military base (Selth 2007: 3-15). India has an exclusive military presence in Bhutan. What is striking, however, is a shrinking list of such countries, and a growing number of cases that bring more doubts about any military monopoly of a particular great power. Djibouti, Syria, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Ukraine to some extent—all these countries remind us that great powers' monopoly on military presence can be challenged. However, this is not a unidirectional clear transformation that allows researchers to discover a new paradigm for the problematic area of the spheres of influence.

Conclusions

Spheres of influence are repeatedly revolving in the public discourse. Yet, few authors discuss their essence and attempt to find a correct understanding of their reconfiguration after the Cold War (Ferguson and Hast: 280). The above study of military bases demonstrates that the rise of globalisation has partially transformed the security domain at the global level. Basically, great powers still avoid full military installations in countries considered either as the sphere of influence of another great power or simply located in their adversary's close neighbourhood. There is, however, at least one convincing case: Djibouti that hosts substantial military installations of Western countries and China. The Syrian case seems to be less clear because military bases of rivals have served as an element of rivalry, conflict and cooperation at once. The security situation of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as explained earlier does not clarify if the great powers intend to altogether resign from recognising other great powers' spheres of influence. Overall, the discussed cases cannot seriously undermine the thesis that spheres of influence are an element of the contemporary international system. However, along with Susanna Hast's (2014: 19-20) observations, a pejorative aspect of spheres of influence persisted: the idea of "encirclement" by establishing military bases functions as a public accusation.

What is striking is that results summarised for the post-Cold War period are often imprecise. The study of military bases gives an incomplete answer to important questions. This implies a need for further research. Therefore, the issue requires studies in the field of security, such as weaponry

purchases from great powers. The economic domain can be investigated by analysing free trade agreements, customs unions and single market communities dominated by one major power. Another path for research is the trade share of each major power in a particular country or region. If one has most of the international trade volume, he/she is still far from “monopoly”, nonetheless, “a dominant power” might be the correct description. Finally, discursive practices regarding spheres of influence need to be reconsidered. This should encompass not only normative aspects but also highly political ones: discourse analysis can reveal de facto acceptance of spheres of influence, disagreements over subordination and intentional superordination.

Another interesting and promising path for further explanation of spheres of influence regards democracy. At first glance, the sovereignty of *demos* contradicts any external superordination. Thus, the post-Cold War “wave” of democratisation can contribute to the erosion of the spheres of influence. The methodological challenge consists in detaching democratisation as explanatory variable from other coincidental processes including globalisation or the collapse of formal empires such as the Soviet Union. If democracy is taken seriously, spheres of influence cannot survive. Then, endless competition is the rule of the game, not a geographic division of influences.

Bibliography

- Ahmad, N., 2017. Iran’s quest for foreign naval bases. *The New Arab*, [online] 24 January. Available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2017/1/24/irans-quest-for-foreign-naval-bases> [accessed 21 October 2020].
- Bearak, M., 2019. In strategic Djibouti, a microcosm of China’s growing foothold in Africa, *The Washington Post*, [online] 30 December. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-strategic-djibouti-a-microcosm-of-chinas-growing-foothold-in-africa/2019/12/29/a6e664ea-beab-11e9-a8b0-7ed8a0d5dc5d_story.html [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Browne, R., 2018. Chinese lasers injure US military pilots in Africa, Pentagon says. *CNN*, [online] 4 May. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/03/politics/>

- chinese-lasers-us-military-pilots-africa/index.html [accessed 15 November 2019].
- Bryła, J., 2002. *Strefy wpływów w stosunkach międzynarodowych. Aspekty teoretyczne i praktyczne na przykładzie supermocarstw*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe INPiD UAM.
- Burc, R., 2019. The Long Kurdish Struggle. *The New York Times*, [online] 22 October. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/22/opinion/erdogan-kurds-syria.html> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Chulov, M., 2010. Iran backs Maliki for second term as Iraqi PM. *The Guardian*, [online] 18 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/18/iran-iraq-maliki-ahmadinejad-sadr> [accessed 15 November 2019].
- Cooley, A., 2005. *Logics of Hierarchy: The Organization of Empires, States, and Military Occupations*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Darracq, V., 2014. France in Central Africa: The reluctant interventionist. *Al Jazeera*, [online] 11 February. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/2/11/france-in-central-africa-the-reluctant-interventionist/> [accessed 28 October 2020].
- Destradi, S., 2010. Regional powers and their strategies: empire, hegemony, and leadership. *Review of International Studies*, 36(4): 903-930.
- Dyner, A. M., 2020. The Importance of Foreign Military Bases for Russia. *PISM Bulletin* No. 112, 25 May. Available at: https://pism.pl/publications/The_Importance_of_Foreign_Military_Bases_for_Russia [accessed 28 October 2020].
- Fearon, J. D. and Laitin, D. D., 2004. Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States. *International Security*, 28(4): 5-43.
- Ferguson, I. and Hast, S., 2018. Introduction: The Return of Spheres of Influence? *Geopolitics* 23(2): 277-284.
- Grossman, D. and Huynh, D., 2019. Vietnam's Defense Policy of 'No' Quietly Saves Room for 'Yes'. *RAND*, [online] 21 January. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/01/vietnams-defense-policy-of-no-quietly-saves-room-for.html> [accessed 21 October 2020].
- Harkavy, R. E., 1989. *Bases Abroad: The Global Foreign Military Presence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hast, S., 2014. *Spheres of Influence in International Relations: History, Theory and Politics*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Headley, T., 2018. *The Diplomat*, [online] 4 December. Available

- at: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/chinas-djibouti-base-a-one-year-update/> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Hurd, I., 1999. Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics. *International Organization*, 53(2): 379-408.
- Ikenberry, G. J. and Nexon, D. H., 2019. Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders. *Security Studies*, 28(3): 395-421.
- Indian Naval Base in Vietnam at Cam Ranh Port To Protect Hanoi's Economic and Territorial Interest, 2018. *Defence News*, [online], 9 December. Available at: <http://www.indiandefensenews.in/2018/12/indian-military-base-in-vietnam-at-cam.html> [accessed 21 October 2020].
- Jackson, V., 2020. Understanding spheres of influence in international politics. *European Journal of International Security*, 5(3): 255-274.
- Jerdén, B., 2017. Security expertise and international hierarchy: the case of 'The Asia-Pacific Epistemic Community'. *Review of International Studies*, 43(3): 494-515.
- Krasner, S. D., 1999. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kreuder-Sonnen, C., 2019. International authority and the emergency problematique: IO empowerment through crises. *International Theory*, 11(2): 182-210.
- Kyrgyz MPs vote to shut US base, 2009. *BBC*, [online] 19 February. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7898690.stm> [accessed 21 August 2019].
- Lake, D. A., 2007. Escape from the State of Nature: Authority and Hierarchy in World Politics. *International Security*, 32(1): 47-79.
- Lake, D. A., 2009. *Hierarchy in International Relations*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Lake, D. A., 2017. Domination, Authority, and the Forms of Chinese Power. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 10(4): 357-382.
- Lanoszka, A., 2013. Beyond consent and coercion: using republican political theory to understand international hierarchies. *International Theory*, 5(3): 382-413.
- Macleod, H., 2008. From Syrian fishing port to naval power base: Russia moves into the Mediterranean. *The Guardian*, [online] 8 October. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/08/syria.russia> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Manas International Airport. Ganci Air Base / Manas Air Base Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, n/d. *GlobalSecurity.org*, [online].

- Available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/manas.htm> [accessed 21 August 2019].
- Manthan, S., 2012. *Sino-Indian rivalry in the Indo-Pacific*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Marantidou, V., 2014. *Revisiting China's 'String of Pearls' Strategy: Places 'with Chinese Characteristics' and their Security Implications*. Pacific Forum CSIS: Issues & Insights, 14(7).
- Melvin, N., 2019. *The foreign military presence in the horn of Africa region*, SIPRI Background Paper, April. Solna: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, 2016. *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on January 21, 2016* [online] 21 January. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1333741.shtml [accessed 15 January 2020].
- Nexon, D. H. and Neumann, I. B., 2018. Hegemonic-order theory: A field-theoretic account. *European Journal of International Relations*, 24(3): 662-686.
- Ó Tuathail, G., 2002. Post-Cold War Geopolitics: Contrasting Superpowers in a World of Global Dangers. In: Johnston, R. J., Taylor, P. J. and Watts, M. J., eds. *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Pfeffer, A., 2012. Both Iran and Israel Have Military Bases in Eritrea, Global Intel Reports. *Haaretz*, [online] 12 December. Available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/amp/premium-israel-iran-have-bases-in-eritrea-1.5271574> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Prys, M., 2010. Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood. *International Studies Review*, 12(4): 479-504.
- Putz, C., 2015. Will There Be an Indian Air Base in Tajikistan? *The Diplomat*, [online] 15 July. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/will-there-be-an-indian-air-base-in-tajikistan/> [accessed 4 August 2019].
- Rubin, M., 2019. It's Time the Pentagon Finds an Alternative to Djibouti, *The National Interest*, [online] 25 August. Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/it%E2%80%99s-time-pentagon-finds-alternative-djibouti-75966> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Russia 'considering military bases in Cuba and Vietnam', 2016. *BBC*, [online] 7 October. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37591756> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Russian Naval Base at Tartus / Tartous, n/d. *GlobalSecurity.org*, [online]. Available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/>

- military/world/syria/tartous.htm [accessed 21 January 2020].
- Saull, R., 2012. Rethinking Hegemony: Uneven Development, Historical Blocs, and the World Economic Crisis. *International Studies Quarterly*, 56(2): 323-338.
- Schmidt, S., 2014. Foreign Military Presence and the Changing Practice of Sovereignty: A Pragmatist Explanation of Norm Change. *American Political Science Review*, 108(4): 814-829.
- Schmidt, S., 2020. *Armed Guests: Territorial Sovereignty and Foreign Military Basing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schmitt, E., Nechepurenko, I. and Chivers, C. J., 2018. The truth about the brutal four-hour battle between Russian mercenaries and US commandos in Syria, *Independent*, [online] 26 May. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/battle-syria-us-russian-mercenaries-commandos-islamic-state-a8370781.html> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Scott, D., 2008. The Great Power 'Great Game' between India and China: 'The Logic of Geography'. *Geopolitics*, 13(1): 1-26.
- Selth, A., 2007. *Chinese Military Bases in Burma: The Explosion of a Myth*, Griffith Asia Institute, Regional Outlook Paper No. 10.
- Shih, G., 2019. In Central Asia's forbidding highlands, a quiet newcomer: Chinese troops. *The Washington Post*, [online] 19 February. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20_story.html [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Snyder, T., 2015. The Real Reason Russia Is 'Helping' Syria, *Time*, [online] 30 September. Available at: <https://time.com/4054941/putin-russia-syria/> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Starr, B. and Browne, R., 2018. US-led coalition strikes kill pro-regime forces in Syria, *CNN*, [online] 8 February. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/07/politics/us-strikes-pro-regime-forces-syria/index.html> [accessed 4 December 2020].
- Syria war: US deploys reinforcements to Syria after Russia clashes, 2020. *BBC News*, [online], 19 September. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54215915> [accessed 21 October 2020].
- Vertin, Z., 2019. *Red Sea Rivalries: The Gulf, the Horn, & the New Geopolitics of the Red Sea*. Brookings Doha Center, August. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/>

- uploads/2019/06/Red-Sea-rivalries-The-Gulf-the-Horn-and-the-new-geopolitics-of-the-Red-Sea.pdf
- Vine, D., 2015. *Base Nation: How US military bases abroad harm America and the world*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Voelsen, D. and Schettler, L. V., 2019. International political authority: on the meaning and scope of justified hierarchy in international relations. *International Relations*, 33(4): 540-562.
- Waltz, K. N., 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.
- Yeo, A., 2009. Not in Anyone's Backyard: The Emergence and Identity of a Transnational Anti-Base Network. *International Studies Quarterly*, 53(3): 571-594.
- Zürn, M., Binder, M. and Ecker-Ehrhardt, M., 2012. International authority and its politicization. *International Theory*, 4(1): 69-106.