

**SPHERES OF INFLUENCE****Past & Present**

Course code	M.A. DLB 0861
Semester	FALL 2026
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Office hours	TBA
Class times	TBA
Classroom	TBA

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

Past & Present

Course description:

This course is an exploration of the changing characteristics of empire through time. The aim is to understand the evolution of the international political economy in a global historical context. The course will look at some examples of territorial colonial empires, established through use of hard power and that set up rigid hierarchies and chiefly, zero-sum outcomes. Going forward the course will cover the more recent and subtler manifestations of global empires such as the dominance of technology companies' world over, of the sanction's regime, the institutional power major IGOs, the so-called military industrial complex and the nature of globalized development in general with its inherent vulnerabilities. The overall aim of the course is to engender an understanding of Global power, in political, economic, and cultural areas.

The objective is to understand the world as it is, beyond the silos of nationalism and to grasp the shaping of the world, of humanity & its circumstances via transnational or Global power, in particular. Various frontiers of global change will be discussed with the assumption that most of these frontiers or spheres of influence today, represent a *sphere of competition*, among nations. Power at the global level is a cumulation of dominance in these multiple spheres of influence that are not limited to physical territoriality. While it is difficult to broach, myriad change on a global scale, it is both worthwhile and necessary to engender a wider discourse that is not limited by national chauvinism. The subject-matter of this course is an attempt to focus such a discourse.

Learning objectives:

- i. To understand, overall, the growth of multiple globalized spheres of influence, that are accessed by multiple stakeholders albeit, dominated by a few.
- ii. To comprehend the disruptive potential of transnational power, particularly in periods of heightened competition and conflict.
- iii. To understand the limits of national power and its inter-section w/ transnational power and engender an appreciation for the dynamics of our inter-connected global village.
- iv. To view the world's existent conflicts, it's mechanisms for peace & stability vs the spirit of competition, opportunism & aspiration through lens of multiple globalized spheres of influence.
- v. To question, the standards being set by the consolidation of transnational power, via multiple spheres while holding societal progress today as a global need & endeavour to be measured in terms of change that is rooted in human rights for all & ecological sustainability, everywhere.
- vi. To grasp the astounding evolution of human societies from the earlier waves of globalization and to foster discourse on the ongoing & expected changes of the contemporary period.
- vii. To stoke a solutions-thinking reimagination, oriented towards creating better standards in the spheres of transnational power and in the very least to think on how to bypass or halt the creation of new low standards for the majority in the global village.

Weekly Lecture topics: (Listed):

The following covers twelve spheres of transnational power and the remaining weeks address the impact both in historic & contemporary periods and of the need for progress mindful of global majority.

- I. TERRITORIAL SPHERE | Colonial Empires: European scramble for Africa, Asia & Latin America.
- II. TERRITORIAL SPHERE RENEGOTIATED | post-colonial period: Legacy, opportunity & challenges.
- III. SPHERE OF HARD POWER: Cold War era & the emergence of the Military-Industrial Complex.
- IV. SPHERE OF SOFT-POWER: Post-Cold War period and the rise of Globalization.
- V. SPHERE OF INSTITUTIONAL POWER: Landscape of Globalized development.
- VI. SPHERE OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE: Corporate power as dominant influence on politics & society.
- VII. INT'L SOCIAL SPHERE: Tribalism within the Global village.
- VIII. HIGH SEAS SPHERE: Global Commons of the Maritime frontier.
- IX. RESOURCE-SPHERE: Oil, Gas, and rare-earth minerals & metals.
- X. BIO-SPHERE: Maintaining the system that sustains us all.
- XI. CYBER-SPHERE: Internet, e-Globalization & Surveillance Capitalism.
- XII. QUANTUM SPHERE: AI, Machine learning, Neural networks & Metaverses.
- XIII. COSMOS-SPHERE: Global Commons of the Space frontier.
- XIV. INEFFICIENCIES OF GLOBAL SYSTEM: Past and Present.
- XV. HUMANITY'S PROGRESS: Global village's need for collective care.

Course readings - General reference:

Students can expect an incremental dose of readings on a weekly basis. The following are some general references on course subject matter, that will be part of lectures.

- UNCLOS: United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. <https://www.unclos.org/>
- UDHR: Universal Declaration: [Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations](#)
- UN SDG: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- AI: Asimov's three laws of robotics: [How Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics Impacts AI - Unite.AI](#)
- Elliot, Jennifer. A. [An Introduction to Sustainable Development \(aiu.edu\)](#)
- Ernst, Waltraud & Pati, Biswamoy. [India's Princely States: People, Princes, and Colonialism \(uc.edu.kh\)](#)
- McCauley, Martin. Origins of the Cold War: 1941-49. [9781315668895_googlepreview.pdf](#)
- Zuboff, Shoshana. The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The fight for Human Future at the new frontier of Power. [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism \(ashoka.edu.in\)](#)

Assessment Criterion:

ASSIGNMENT (%) & DEADLINE	REQUIREMENT
Critical Analysis Essay (35%) 10 th OCTOBER	Students are required to write a 1500–2000-word essay on the impact on the global majority of any one of the following phenomena: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Surveillance capitalism & Anti-Privacy and its transformative impact on the human experience. ii. Corporate power, State power vs the Grassroots: Management of the well-being and interests of those comprising bell-curve of society. iii. Sustainable development, for the Global village: What are the perquisites or shifts that will take us there. iv. War as a mode of ascent: What are some useful takeaways for conflict-prevention from the Cold War era or WWII or any other historic period. v. Material vs Social progress: The more we innovate technologically, the more we are confronted with our social progress i.e., intrinsic values.
SWOT analysis TEAM Presentation (35%) 10 th NOVEMBER	Students are required to make a presentation, using broadly, the SWOT analysis methodology for any one of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Melting of Arctic Icecaps: Threats and Opportunities in the context of traditional and non-traditional security. ii. Development of AGI: Towards disruption: Explore the potential two-fold outcomes – the bountiful solutions & innovations expected vs a staggered destruction of human civilization & ingenuity. iii. Humans as a multi-planetary species: What are the pros vs cons of looking space-wards with colossal ambitions? Is this the natural, next step? iv. Historical memory & its contemporary impacts: Examine the pros vs cons of not reconciling narratives between erstwhile foes via discourse or diplomacy? v. Cyber-space and its insecurity: What are pros vs cons of a digitised global village connected via systemically vulnerable apps, software, and devices. vi. Resource competition vs sustainability: What should be the red lines between human need & hunger for resources and vs Mother Earth’s complex & life sustaining balance.
Endterm Exam (30%)	Two essay questions (of 15 marks each) need to be answered out of an option of six listed on the question paper. The subject matter will span the course and include what is discussed in class and covered in lecture slides & notes.

Weekly Lecture topics: (Detailed):

- 1) **Week ONE: TERRITORIAL SPHERE | Colonial Empires: European scramble for Africa, Asia & Latin America.** International supply chains, fortunes of Metropoles vs colonies, use of slave labour, spread of religion, notions of exceptionalism and its global consequence, superiority & inferiority complexes, and the punitive dynamic with the other. Chauvinistic nationalism and its evergreen appeal. Colonial dynamics – what are they and is the responsibility for changing that dynamic, two-fold (shared)? Cultural cross-influencing, familiarising & its cohesive effects over the long-term on the Global village.
- 2) **Week Two: TERRITORIAL SPHERE RENEGOTIATED: Post-Colonial period: Legacy, impacts, opportunity, and challenges** for the newly de-colonized world. Great expectations of the long-suffering humanity and newly alive nation-states saddled with major economic & social challenges vs the comparative advantages for countries that had opportunity & conditions for decades of relatively inclusive peaceful industrialization. Joining global community amid brewing Great Power rivalries. Territorial Revisionism and the majority fear of ambitions, unchecked. Contemporary focus on alleged new world order or global transition via current flashpoints of conflicts in new territorial spheres such as Russia's western periphery, South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, construct of the Indo-Pacific, the Arctic.
- 3) **Week Three: SPHERE OF HARD POWER: Cold War era & the Military-Industrial Complex.** Understanding the legacy of a period of militarism, mistrust, and competition on framing the contemporary regional and global security architectures. Focus on security groupings such as NATO, Warsaw Pact, CENTO, SEATO etc of the Cold War era. Compare & contrast of CW trends w/ the contemporary period's formations of QUAD, AUKUS & NATO expansion, and their combined tilting of Global politics. Are the coming decades to be, periods of multiple conflicts of multipolarity or are the possibilities for a peaceful-prosperous way forward, also robust? Défense indigenization – who's doing well here? Military modernization vs military power projection as indicators for International Security.
- 4) **Week Four: SPHERE OF SOFT-POWER: Globalization via MNCs, IGOs, & Int'l Media** as global influences, semi-autonomous from state power. The positive transformative power of private enterprise in bringing people out poverty, towards choiceful abundance and greater socio-economic cohesion domestically & globally. Democracy, capitalism, philanthropy, and culture as the four prongs of western soft influence in the post-CW period. The competition of soft power influence, arguably at its height during the Cold War era. Washington vs. Beijing consensus – what are the differences? What are the trade-offs versus rewards for development that is globalized i.e., accomplished via global laissez faire forces vs. nationalized development where arguably there is more national agency? How do these two modes relate to soft power primacy and ensuing cultural acclimatization, and alignment between countries? Contemporary focus: Soft power & dependency

theory and the spheres of soft-influence being created by Great Power rivals USA-China-Russia: Who's the softer touch? (Tactics: Use of hard power, diplomacy, soft power, economic power etc.)

- 5) **Week Five: SPHERE OF INSTITUTIONAL POWER: Landscape of Globalized development:** Cold war period and the failures of Socialist Command economies for post-war Eastern Europe and some of the de-colonised world. Post CW- the uphill trek for developing countries given the hierarchies of the IPE manifesting over time in the international sanctions' regime, terms & conditions, of IGOs such as IMF, World Bank, their influence, and that of supranational entities such as European Union economic community. Role of economic IGOs in entrenching hierarchies. The importance of economic sovereignty versus its feasibility. Contemporary period focus on West led-sanctions regime and the balancing of it from Russia, China, and interactions within the Global South in general. Emergent competitive multilateralism (BRICS, SCO etc) with rise of multipolarity. Great expectations put-upon multilateral institutions for development and conflict-resolution. Looming flashpoints of conflict and the need for effective platforms for international engagement and collaboration. If multilateralism is a sub-set of International Relations, what needs to change to make the institutional sphere more fruitful for the global majority?

- 6) **Week Six: SPHERE OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE: Corporate power as a dominant influence over the political class & society** as a whole. The juxta-positioning of social progress & grassroots well-being against the priorities & cultural values of the business-political elite and the trans-national aspects of the same. The impact on society and the environment of under-regulated trans-national corporate power. Trans-national corporate power and the direction of aspiration, globally – what is this and how is this expected to shift? The structure of the global village in terms of manufacturing-services-resources-innovation. Opportunities & boons of global sourcing and product diversity. Painful transitions for grassroots as a side-effect of corporate prioritising on a global scale– focussing on the loss of habitat for some humans & much of animal kingdom, flight of manufacturing jobs, outsourcing, its consequence & what it represents, concerns of small businesses & farmers vs corporate monopolising tendencies. How much of the costs are transitory vs problematic in the long-term? Corporate power's relative camaraderie w/state power and the space for grassroots activism. What is good vs bad capitalism and how do we know when there is a need for reform or oversight? Is the system, rigged or skewed due to first mover advantages such as in the Big Tech space? Best practices & organizational culture – as a top-down feed from corporate headquarters abroad to local offices – the positives vs negatives of the same. Corporate resources & ambitions as a rivalling influence parallel to state power. Public trust – in corporate vs political rockstars.

- 7) **Week Seven: INT'L SOCIAL SPHERE: Tribalism within the Global village.** Beyond material profusion – what makes for a well-adapted global village versus a mal-adapted one? The in-group's vs out-groups in terms of status quo of hierarchies. Cancel culture & political correctness vs traditional values. Extrinsic (societal) i.e. values professed vs Intrinsic (sacred ethics) i.e. values

adhered. The soup of values as a useful societal mirror over historic periods. Why does the clash of values, keep returning to haunt us? Globalization and nationalism as cohesive vs divisive influences on the barriers formed of values. Politically incorrect lessons of previous historic periods. Social progress as a tribal vs national vs global aspiration. Multi-culturalism, its importance, and its discontents. Emergence of Bi-culturalism, bi-cultural identities & households. Social progress & its prerequisites vs the status-quo of dominant culture in the global village. Concerns and expectation in periods of international power transition. Crests and troughs of right-wing nationalism and what they represent. Globalization and its under-belly; a harbinger of unbargained, unexpected problems of tribalism like terrorism, piracy, illegal immigration, and the push-back against same reflected upon the legal and socio-political landscape.

- 8) **Week Eight: SPHERE OF THE HIGH SEAS: Global Commons of the Maritime frontier:** Expected change for the global village in the form of melting polar icecaps – impact on IPE, traditional security, and the natural world. Importance and limits of UNCLOS – comparative order since its foundation for the maritime frontiers today relative to the adventurism and opportunism of previous historic periods. UNCLOS vs lingering historical claims. USA’s non-ratification of UNCLOS – pros vs cons. Rules-based order – a call to war or peace? Traditional security in the context of perfectly legal military power projection on EEZs, freedom of navigation for warships, boost to militarism and the dance towards potential, harmful escalation: What have we learnt from history? Cyclically emergent problems of piracy and maritime terrorism. Non-traditional security: What can be done to keep the much busier maritime global commons of today, abundant w/biodiversity, clean, and safe? The endangerment to marine world w/ mounting consumerism and human interference. The continual scourge of plastic waste-generation for the high seas & its fauna. The boat people of many nations, escaping hardship and continuing to find it. Contemporary focus: Impact of conflicts as escalating factor for refugee & displaced populations crisis. Implications for a future where there may be multiple conflicts of competition and a failure of multilateralism – its consequential strain on the global village.
- 9) **Week Nine: RESOURCE-SPHERE: Oil, Gas, and rare-earth minerals & metals:** Energy security, crucial for transportation & electrification and the running of economies. Rare-earth minerals as essential for era of digitization. Which countries are resource rich in these areas? How does the need of these resources, tilt contemporary foreign relations? Will the purported move towards renewables or nuclear energy impact in any significant way, the insecurity or competition over these resources? USA and China’s brewing antagonisms, attempts to de-couple dependencies in the context of resource competition and overall development race. Contemporary focus: Flashpoints of conflict and what they represent to stakeholders in terms of resource exploration. E.g.: Arctic region and SCS. Russia’s longer-term niche as an energy provider in the Global village. Expected continued dominance of other major energy players.

- 10) **Week Ten: BIO-SPHERE: Maintaining the system that sustains us all.** Hyperrealities of politics & its vicissitudes vs the reality of natural world and its consistent degradation. Is the responsibility to slow the tipping over of natural balance, the forte of the global business & political elite or not necessarily? The demands of human habitation and accompanying problems such as deforestation, poaching, decline of ground water table, congestion etc. How much of this represents poor governance or policy. Systems theory understanding of the global commons' sustainability issue and the idea of shared responsibility, globally regardless of legal loopholes. Existent divergences in Global North vs Global South in terms of disease, food shortages, access to clean drinking water etc. How much of the responsibility for these maladies is national vs international? Climate Change: Are there any upsides to the melting of polar ice caps? Climate change as manifesting in more frequent & harsh weather phenomenon such as forest fires, hurricanes, extreme winter & summer temperatures etc. Importance of wildlife corridors for maintaining the ecological balance & heritage of nations: Fostering a win-win dynamic w/ the natural world (e.g., job creation in safari tourism or conservation) versus zero-sum goals that heighten imbalances in nature.
- 11) **Week Eleven: CYBER-SPHERE: Internet, e-Globalization & Surveillance Capitalism.** Opportunities and boons of global sourcing in the information age. Cyber-security w/systemically insecure apps, software, and devices. The so-called data 'revolution' and its consequence on the relationship between individual and the state in both democratic and authoritarian states. Is the data revolution, in fact a revolution i.e., empowering for the masses? The end of privacy and the subtle imposition of surveillance capitalism – a one-way mirror. What does surveillance capitalism imply for the democratic character of societies? Consequences for the individual, family-unit, and society under the lopsided gaze of surveillance capitalism. Rising consumerism along with micro-targeted advertising: A win-win? Dystopia via a tyranny of conveniences. The State vs MNCs as the sweeping change-makers: Who's thinking of grassroots wellbeing– those motivated by votes & power or by profits & power? Re-negotiating inclusion and safe spaces for women, children & minorities in the wild wild west & east of the digital landscape. Digital empires and the importance of digital sovereignty. The weaponization of technological innovation (e.g.: drone-warfare, cyber-warfare) to re-enforce or challenge hierarchies in the IPE and wield power for its sake.
- 12) **Week Twelve: QUANTUM SPHERE: AI, Machine learning, Neural networks & Metaverses:** The cutting edge of high-tech and the purported boons and emergent concerns on forthcoming & pervasive technological changes that are designed to be far-reaching and expected to revolutionize the global village. Will this new technology approach, utopia (widening prosperity & multiple breakthroughs of innovation) or take us towards dystopia (suffering via system design & human biases)? Why is technological innovation, going in an invasive direction – was this an inevitability or an initial sub-optimal decision? The changing idea of the human resource thanks to data mining. Public policy, civil liberties in the age of anti-privacy and burgeoning AI systems, globally. How can the risks to humans be mitigated & the good traditions and standards of the social contract be upheld? Being Human & nourishing human minds. Visions and promises of the founding fathers.

AI systems: Its dual potential in compounding human biases or an efficient & unprecedented protection against the same. Invoking superintelligence – the exploration of AGI – is this ideal or done better via the laissez faire modus operandi i.e. under limited private & primarily state control? AGI and the prospects for global competition and international security.

- 13) **Week Thirteen: COSMOS-SPHERE: Global Commons of the Space frontier:** Initial forays of space exploration as deeply symbolic, highly competitive, tactical-public undertakings. Satellite imagery, militarism in space frontier and the heightening of threat perceptions in global politics. Importance of satellite technology in enhancing digitization. AGI scaling up w/ satellite technology. Privatization of the space exploration -will this boost cooperation & knowledge sharing between nations or heighten competition? Cluttering & littering in space. Mars or alternative planet option – symptomatic of humanity’s existential fears (pessimistic scenarios: WWII - nuclear apocalypse) or of human ingenuity seeking to pioneer conquering of evermore frontiers (i.e. new worlds)? If life-supportive capacities are established within our solar system; how will that impact consideration to Earth and its human & animal inhabitants. The more we innovate technologically, the more we face the mirror of our societal progress?
- 14) **Week Fourteen: INEFFICIENCIES OF THE GLOBAL SYSTEM: Past and Present:** Evolution of Labour rights over global political history – hardships of enslavement, feudalism, earlier periods of industrialization, non-uniform practices in corporate global activity. Contemporary period – economies where daily wage earners are the majority – an economic indicator as much or more than GDP? Importance of addressing wage issues especially in crucial frontlines like, hospitals, armed forces etc. Periods of hardship (e.g.: Covid-19) and the class (socio-economic) realities of same. Primacy of foreign relations in building economic resilience for smaller countries or non-diversified economies. Lessening of the agrarian-economy trend where there were many households with ability to live off the land vs current rapid urbanization with its greater vulnerability to economic shocks from the global system. The importance of policy-correctness in handling periods of economic upheaval. What, must be locally sourced vs globally – to augment sustainability & focus needs. Gold standard vs Dollar. Cryptocurrencies – as an anti-establishment idea. Should digital currencies belong exclusively to states – or not? Developed countries exporting waste to developing world. Impact of plastics & chemical interference (e.g.: insecticides on food, industrial waste entering river systems) on the natural world. Dependency on coal as an inefficient energy source and the challenges of shifting core energy resources. Imbalances created by hyperrealities of profits & demand vs the actual realities of adverse impacts on natural world. Humanity as a dependant of the natural world.
- 15) **Week Fifteen: HUMANITY’S PROGRESS: Global village’s need for collective care.** Leadership in the league of significant Global power, tend to signal prominence by declaring the charitable impacts of their global influence while other players emphasize national interests. Global

Leadership in politics and business as primary lever for humanity's progress. Importance of human-centric policy approach in business and politics. Needed: Global leadership oriented not merely towards narratives of nationalism, historical glories, empire-seeking, or dogma but towards a new global collective ideation that seeks to establish standards and precedents that are beneficial for the Global majority. For e.g.: The win-win of Conflict mediation. Politically, the global-collective ideation may be prioritised via reform of multilateral institutions to make them more effective for productive engagement – fostering opportunities for reconciliation, collaboration, and conflict avoidance. On the business-innovation front – the issue that confronts us is that rapid technological change often places the horse before the cart in terms of societal readiness. This is evidenced in the experience of digitization and global connectivity in general wherein the right social conditioning has not preceded the utopic / dystopic transformation that is occurring. There remains today a significant divergence in human experiences that could be bridged or resolved w/more responsible, robust, and open international engagement on areas of compatibility. A major task for the business and political movers & shakers is to consider the costs vs benefits of not making the global village, sustainable everywhere and respectful of human rights of all. Beyond that consideration of costs of business as usual, the need arguably is to create the technologies, best practices and supply-chains and systems that power that vision of peaceful sustainability and help humanity duck, from the many threats we face as a collective. Important to beware going forward of chauvinism (us vs them narratives) that will continue to birth a lethality of technologies which in turn will continue to escalate grave existential risks for humanity. Given that connectivity within the global village is an inescapable digitized reality – it behoves those with significant transnational influence to make that connectivity a positive and predictable experience for the global majority.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Students are expected to come to class having done their assigned readings. The first portion of class will be a presentation and lecture by myself. The second portion will be your opportunity to actively participate in class discussion. You are expected to do so with comments, insights and questions that are helpful, insightful and move the discussion forward. To make sure the class space is inclusive, and everyone is contributing, I may call on you in class.
- Disrespect in any shape or form towards your fellow students or any attempts to disrupt the class decorum will not be tolerated. This includes arriving to class on time and not using technology during class period i.e., other than to access course content or share related information.
- Academic integrity: All the work that you submit, must be your original work. No plagiarism. Students are also required to abide by any examination rules set forth by JSIA.
- All assignments must be submitted on time. Take precautions to ensure that you have access to reliable internet connection, so you submit your assignments on time.

COURSE LETTER GRADES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION			
Letter Grade	Percentage of Marks	Grade Points	Grade Interpretation
O	80 and above	8	Outstanding: Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability.
A+	75 - 79	7.5	Excellent: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability.
A	70 - 74	7	Very Good: Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules, and principles, critically analyse existing material and originality in thinking and presentation.
A-	65 - 69	6	Good: Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills.
B+	60 - 64	5	Fair: Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B	55 - 59	4	Acceptable: Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of the study and reasonable critical and analytical skills.
B-	50 - 54	3	Marginal: Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials, and poor critical and analytical skills.
P1	45 - 49	2	Pass 1: Pass with Basic understanding of the subject matter.
P2	40 - 44	1	Pass 2: Pass with Rudimentary understanding of the subject matter.
F	Below 40	0	Fail: Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials. Will require repeating the course.

Citations: You may use either MLA, APA or Chicago style of citation but kindly use same throughout work.