

FOREWORD

The Romanian-American relations have long been at the center of various research studies pertaining to multiple disciplines. They do remain, however, insufficiently accessible to larger audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. As such, a new book, from a tested, albeit interesting, perspective, is more than welcome. As a collection of opinions-editions pieces, most of which were published in Romanian quality journals, the present volume shines in terms of readability and comprehensibility.

Alexandru Cristian, a young historian with a grasp on defense and international security studies, contextualizes the bilateral relations between Romania and the United States, devoting particular attention to their latest achievement – the Strategic Partnership, by placing them into a larger picture shaped by geopolitics.

A common belief which pervades the Romanian popular culture, insofar as to be even considered part of the foundational narratives of this nation, relates to its fate of being located “at the crossroads of Great Empires”, a true burden it had to bear in order to ensure its survival. This sense of space, and its adversity in this case, has deeply penetrated the national consciousness, from little to no connection to the advent of political geography as a discipline.

This bit of conventional wisdom, shared one way or the other by most nations in the area, broadly and inadvertently postulated these inescapable ties of geography and international politics. It found ground in the works and studies of scholars and

statesmen who have dedicated, especially since the early 20th century, a growing interest in the role political geography plays in world affairs. They have all striven to mark this greater area as situated in the midst of geopolitical tectonic shifts. Thus, the “crossroads of Great Empires” came to be known as Mackinder’s “inner crescent”, Spykman’s “Rimland” or Fairgrieve’s “crash zone”, to name just the classics. Moreover, in spite of the accelerating globalizing trends, with their increased interdependence and interconnectedness, technological progress, greater mobility, all of which translated into a lesser focus on borders and territory, the study and practice of geopolitics have not dwindled, they have been revived and refined instead.

This book was written along the lines of this mindset and virtually all its reasoning develops within this framework. Owing to the author’s background as a historian, the book explores in its first part the bilateral relations in a chronological arrangement, while at the same time portraying all the US and Romanian diplomats, at times with vivid details, who have consistently worked to advance both national and common interests, bringing closer two nations with shared ideals, values, concerns and, as it is argued in the volume, historical experiences.

Obviously, the crux of this relationship – the Strategic Partnership – has received considerable attention, and not just descriptively, but also prescriptively. The author takes a clear stance, stating in a straightforward manner that the Strategic Partnership is not merely a culmination point, but a starting one for stronger and deeper bilateral ties. In a written plea offering a rationale for US involvement in the area, he advocates for adding both concreteness and substance to the Strategic Partnership, through juridical commitments encompassing various areas like technology, trade, culture and education, besides trade and security. Unbeknownst to him, as Russia had not initiated its war

of aggression against Ukraine at the time the book was first published in Romanian, the US-Romanian cooperation has grown stronger and wider during the past two years. As such, his proposition was a remarkable feat of foresight.

The set of selected reasons to make a case for firmer US action in the Ponto-Baltic isthmus is twofold. On the one hand, rooted in the political geography school of thought mentioned above, this is an area with a geopolitical weight that simply cannot be overlooked by a world power of the highest caliber, such as the United States. On the other, dealing with international relations studies dedicated to the role of perception, especially related to alliance politics or deterrence, a strengthened American resolve would both dissipate the fear of abandonment of US allies while dissuading hostile powers, especially but not just Russia, at the same time. Finally, as the reputed strategist Colin Gray put it, “geography speaks to mind and imagination”, hence the author’s proposal of a US-backed “Steel Curtain”, which, despite having a name pointing to Churchill, reminds us of Clemenceau’s “cordon sanitaire” alliance-system or Pilsudki’s “Intermarium” federation, albeit in a different form but with the same goal: to contain Russian expansion into Europe.

The second part uncompromisingly insists on the central idea that America’s power is not declining, but transforming. The historical approach is once again present, in that the author reviews the origins of American exceptionalism, going as far back as to its Manifest Destiny origins. The reason for this exposé is to outline the foundation of US power: the American spirit, defined as a belief in the idea of freedom and the will to promote it outward, from the national to the international level. In line with the author’s perspective, this is the melting pot that all the other dimensions of American power (cultural, economic, military etc.) stem from.

Building on the literature committed to the concept of power, a slightly different term is proposed: “brainy power”, which is a sort of smart, as a combination of soft and hard, power based on the American spirit and knowledge- and technology-oriented. Hence, a considerable body text was assigned to depict US efforts to develop a defense space strategy and its dedicated space force. This endeavor is deemed to propel the United States as the world’s first superpower in a new dimension, beyond the traditional sea- and land-based meanings, which in turn will extend in time and scope America’s influence in world affairs. It also serves to prepare the way for a confrontation with China, the real challenger to US power in the long run, albeit not to world hegemony, but to regional supremacy. By underlining the sheer amount of power wielded by a nation endowed with the will to project it in order to promote democracy, rule of law, free markets, security and stability, the unstated aim of this part is to feed the impetus or, in certain cases, to motivate regional actors with regard to seeking stronger US cooperation.

Arguably, Alexandru Cristian’s intention was to answer the “whys” and the “hows” to move the US-Romanian bilateral ties further, to a wider reach and with more added weight. Throughout my career, in the high official positions that I fulfilled, both in Bucharest and in Washington, D.C., I witnessed a propensity, which I have encouraged and supported, to strengthen and expand a cooperation process in which I was partaking. However, this was mainly a milieu of policy- and decision-makers. Hopefully, this volume will help complement a top-down vision and process with a much-needed bottom-up support and understanding, by sending the correct message, in an adequate language, to the wider public, an exploit of utmost importance in an era and for a generation challenged by the fake news phenomenon.

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