

Antonia Colibășanu  
Contemporary Geopolitics and Geoeconomics 2.0  
A Method for Analyzing Global Trends. A (New) World in Crisis?

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# CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS AND GEOECONOMICS 2.0

## A METHOD FOR ANALYZING GLOBAL TRENDS A (NEW) WORLD IN CRISIS?

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Innovation drives progress, making the world go round. This is a common phrase; and we all agree with it. However, innovation is not equivalent to development. Even if innovation aims to help social development, the latter is difficult to achieve. New, innovative ideas are not by default solving our problems. It takes stability and resources to begin thinking about their implementation, considering all that could go wrong and correcting any potential negative outcomes that may appear along the way. It is only after their successful implementation that bright ideas and innovation serve us all.

I am writing these words as the world has been and is still shaken by a global pandemic. We are in desperate need for bright, innovative ideas to (literally) save our world. Several vaccines have recently been approved for use and are being administrated, but a cure hasn't yet been discovered. With new virus strains appearing and the original strain still untamed, the fear of catching the virus will continue to be an important determinant of the global politics and economics until a cure is found.

However, while the pandemic dominates the media (and our lives), it doesn't mean that other events have vanished or decreased in importance. In fact, most geopolitical processes that were underway have accelerated since March 2020. Geographical patterns and economic features continue to speak of the problems and the opportunities of humanity, of communities and nation states. Historically, through innovation, humans have sought to defy the economic and geographical patterns that posed obstacles for social evolution.

As I was writing the first version of this book, in Romanian (my native language), I wanted to highlight a way, a method for deciphering the world: the method of geopol-

itical analysis. This book adapts, through translation, most of the original book, in Romanian, and adds thoughts, including a new chapter, inspired by the pandemic and the other events of 2020. It is, therefore a 2.0 version of my first book: a needed augmentation, considering the global challenges we've experienced.

Some will find it surprising that the title of the book gathers 'geoeconomics' and 'geopolitics' together. Political economy is a geopolitical determinant, after all, so why 'geoeconomics'? Considering I am mentioning this here, there is no mistake in the title. On the contrary, it is a way to signal an important transition. The economy is becoming more political, as it has incorporated and enhanced technology. Wars are no longer fought only by the military, they are also fought by other means, most of them economically empowered. If space and cyberspace are military operational theatres, it is the economy that facilitates them, through the social networks that individuals, communities and nation-states have built over time.

This is why a discussion about complex social systems becomes a must for understanding geopolitical (and geoeconomic) analysis. Knowing the community's borderlines, in all senses, is understanding the forces that shape its development and those that are resisting it. This is why we need to look at the structure of society, considering all aspects that might influence the individuals' common will, making it vulnerable. It is equally important to learn the culture, the values, and the historical background of the society that forms a state.

The first chapters of this book are outlining the specific features needed for understanding national interest, from a historical and a geographical perspective. In doing so, I have focused on the history of geopolitical thought, also

mentioning some Romanian thinkers that have outlined the geopolitical importance of the Black Sea region. In fact, considering the contemporary importance of Eurasian geopolitics, most of the articles I've updated to serve for case studies (when the book is used as a students' manual) are referring to Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus, the Black Sea occupying a central role in my preoccupations.

In the 3rd and 4th chapter, the reader will notice a switch towards the interior problems pertaining the nation state or the society. Complex systems are investigated in their structure, considering all vectors, all factors that might change over time, producing energy and sustaining the state's power in relation with that of other states. In the 5th chapter, we discuss the future, the reasoning and the characteristics of social innovation. This is a must, considering that the primary goal of geopolitical analysis is to tell us what's next, to forecast. These chapters were translated and adapted into English language, as I originally wrote them for the Romanian public.

The 6th chapter, however, is exclusive to this book. I wrote it during the pandemic months of 2020. As the world is facing its most severe crisis, we need to use geopolitical analysis methods not only to understand what comes next but also to decipher the present, to better understand the current reality. We always refer to "the lessons of the past"—for the pandemic, the messy cosmos of human affairs has no real historical equivalent. Globalization has never been this intense as it is today—and never was it more tested. We can apply the analysis method described in the chapter for underlining the threats and opportunities for any given geopolitical actors—specific communities or nation states.

The case study that concludes the book summarizes the major future trends worldwide and then focuses on Europe

and on what makes the current Faultline: the Baltic and the Black Sea regions. It's a risky exercise: one that offers the reader the opportunity to check, in the future, both on the author's analytical capability and the method used. More so, as the pandemic will probably become one "lesson of the past" for future analysts—the readers that this book hopes to get.

In early January 2020, as I was writing the introduction for what was to become the Romanian version of this book, news about the new 5G technology, about Brexit, about Eastern Ukraine, about the (in)stability of Iran, about the US-China trade war, about the new European budget, about Turkey's operations in the Eastern Mediterranean were "the news of the day", catching our attention. Looking back, it is amazing that the very same topics are still being talked about today, a year later. Several items are adding to the list: the potential for conflict between India and China, growing instability in Latin America, and renewed talks of cooperation between the US and Mexico. The pressure of "what's important" is multiplied by the astonishing speed of information, considering most of the media products are currently consumed online. But the themes, along with the analytical principles stay the same.

The map, more and more complex, together with the math, the numbers employed by economists, remain the constants of a world that seems in continuous and accelerated change. The interdisciplinary study of social indicators needs to consider the geographical terrain and the geographical resources both. Above all, we must not forget that the fundamental resource of the Earth is human intelligence. Demographics, through education, turns into a resource—a rare resource, considering its value and its gift: the unique power to innovate.

**PREFACE**

**by George Friedman**  
to the Romanian version

Geopolitics is the study of the relations between nations. It is designed to do more than explain the past, but to predict the future. If it is to predict the future, then it means that political decision makers are predictable. If they are predictable, then these leaders are trapped within the forces generated between countries and within countries. They make history, but not according to whim and random choice.

Contemporary Romanian history is shaped by a single event; the fall of the Soviet Union. Its collapse was not the result of any leader's decision that it should end, nor the result of any massive movement. It was the result of impersonal forces, ranging from the price of oil to massive defense expenditures, to a sclerotic decision making system. The pressures it experienced from its main adversary, the United States, the restlessness within the regions it had occupied in Europe during World War II, and the weakness of Russian institutions determined what would happen. Gorbachev and Yeltsin were both onlookers, at most responding to events, at the worst irrelevant to them.

The entire world was not surprised by this. At least one person: Andre Amalrik predicted this outcome in the book "Can the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?". Written in the 1970s, it laid out clearly the forces that would weaken the Soviet structure and cause it to collapse. Amalrik was killed in a traffic accident on a Spanish highway. He did not live to see the fall, nor explain why the 1984 date was past, but he demonstrated the possibilities that arise from understanding the structure of events, and then drawing conclusions.

The fall of the Soviet Union generated some significant shifts. For the first time since the 15th century, no European country was a global power. There was only one, the United States, whose economic and military power dwarfed all

other nations. This created a paradox. The more powerful the US became relative to other nations, the less interest it had in their behavior.

In the years after the Soviet collapse, Russia retreated from its buffer zone, leaving Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltics—fundamental Russian interests out of its immediate control. This created room for maneuver for the former Soviet satellites, particularly Romania. American disinterest in the region, and the need for Romania and other regional nations to find a mature anchor led them to look toward the Western Europeans, and main institutions such as the European Union and NATO.

NATO used the period of Russian weakness to encroach on the Russian buffer in the Baltics. And given these and other events Russia inevitably, as I discussed in my book *The Next 100 Years*, sought to retrieve what there was of its buffer in Ukraine. It worked to create a pro-Russian government there. An uprising brought down this government and replaced it with a pro-Western government. The Russians asserted that this was a coup d'état engineered by the United States. Russia was in no position to respond directly to these actions but inevitably the Russians had to appear more powerful than they were. This is what brought down the Soviet Union, when the cost of this posture overwhelmed the system. The Russians therefore chose low cost demonstrations such as Syria or hacking computers.

The inevitable response to Russia's attempts to reassert its power was to reverse engineer the Warsaw pact, in the form of an alliance stretching from the Baltics to Romania. This concept, already imagined by Marshall Pilsudski as the *Intermarium*, was designed to create a line of resistance to both Russia and Germany if needed, more robust than any one country

The Baltics, Poland and Romania all engaged. Hungary's failure to participate is the result of two geopolitical features. First, where the other nations are directly touching on Russian land or water interests, Hungary is buffered doubly by Ukraine and the Carpathian Mountains. This provides a secondary dimension to Hungarian policy of maintaining a complex and shifting alliances in order to maintain its options in this geographical situation.

Most important in this Intermarium was the US participation. The American perception of Russia was that it threatened few American interests, but that maintaining Russia behind its buffer zone assured, at low risk and cost, that Russia would not be in a position to increase its threat. Geography therefore required two things. The first that Russia be blocked on the north European Plain. The second was that the Russians not be able to exclude US naval power from the Baltics. What this resulted in was a minimal ground force in Poland, and an equivalent naval and air force in Romania.

The purpose of this presence was a replication of the US Berlin strategy during the Cold War. The US placed a brigade in Berlin, not because it could block a Russian attack, but as a tripwire. If the Russians attacked Berlin they knew they would kill Americans. If they were willing to do that the US would know it was at war and respond accordingly. An attack on Poland or on Romania would similarly signal war to the US for the same reasons. And, therefore, the Russians could not engage Romania and Poland without assuming it was engaging the US. And given relative power, this would deter Russia.

The current Romanian position was predictable from the beginning. It would have a relationship with Europe but Europe could not guarantee Romanian security. Therefore

Romania had to have a stronger alliance, one with other countries in the Intermarium, and the other with the United States. Russia, insecure because of the loss of its buffer, would be tempted greatly by Ukraine and Belarus, but to date it has taken minimal action in either case. Russian action against Romania is of course impossible without the buffer issue.

The focus on the Russians is inevitable, as is a rotation of attention to Turkey. Turkey is both a Black Sea power, and a Balkan power. It has, as expected emerged as a significant regional power, making claims on the eastern Mediterranean, confronting Russia in Libya and at the same time, becoming aggressive in Syria. The long term interest of Turkey must be to control Russian behavior in its region, as history dictates a clash, but also to seek security and opportunities in the Balkans while trying to neutralize the Black Sea. Given this, Romania has both an interest with Turkey to contain the Russians and a fear of Turkish power as it evolves.

Therefore, Romania remains rooted in the Intermarium but its situation becomes more complex. The one constant is a need for a great power that needs Romania's geography, and that is, of course, the United States.

Much of this is a tale of the past. The rest is of the future. However, the point I am making is that geopolitics predicted much of the recent history of Romania, and is now signaling another phase. The ability of geopolitics to read the past without emotion, allows it to see the future the same way.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **NATIONAL IMPERATIVE AND NATIONAL INTEREST — THE ATTRIBUTES OF GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS**

## 1.1. The revenge of economy: the return of geopolitics

Respect pentru oameni și cărți

As we were entering the 21st century, it seemed that the logic (if not the theory) of international relations would change. The idea that globalization was beneficial for humanity seemed to bring forth a new form of governance: the global government was to replace the traditional country-centered one. Everyone seemed to expect a dilution of international relations, as national states were thought to become slowly irrelevant.

In a world where peace was thought to prevail, national elements were supposed to refer only to cultural aspects, no longer driving the political and economic life of the World, as they did in the past. All this evolved from the general optimism that followed the end of the Cold War. But while the conflict had ended, the world wasn't just peaceful. Instead, the world had to be reshaped according to the rules of the victor — the West, but above all the United States of America. However, the rules were not exactly new, and as they stemmed from the war which had just ended, they had to be reinvented, adapting their meaning to the new world. In the process, as it had no contender, the U.S., through globalization, had begun to rule, becoming the global hegemon.

The European Union, NATO, and all the other international organizations initially drawn by the Bretton Woods agreements - all post-War winners - continued to live and expand. Seemingly without competition, the West focused on organic growth, minimizing its global implications to international business.

The United States, the only global maritime power since the end of the second world war, remained the guardian of the world's oceans and since the '90s it began seeking to dilute its continental world-wide involvement. In the

last decade of the 20th century, the U.S. military operations were very calculated. Washington sought the lowest price for weakening the potential threats to stability. The overall global governance of the United States and its allies appeared to be effective—the associated costs being minimal.

In September 2001, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City was the first widely recorded negative effect of globalization. It happened when the United States had established a minimal military budget and low-level military engagement throughout the world. After the events of 9/11, there were ample discussions regarding the consequences of the strategic passivity of the U.S. vis-à-vis the states that were used as proxies in the Cold War by both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. The media published lots of opinion pieces regarding the U.S. foreign policy responsibility and, within only a few months, there was lots to read about the terrorist phenomenon and its causes. The United States announced the “war on terror”, a symbolic and complex syntagma which signaled the new phase of globalization: the formation of a coalition of nation states committed to fighting an inherently transnational and non-state phenomenon.

Meanwhile, Europe became ‘more of a Union’ and less peninsular. In the early 2000s, the enlargement of the European Union—then prosperous, peaceful and Western—meant that the Eastern Europe, made up of the former communist states, ex-satellites of the former U.S.S.R., was to be included into the EU. For these Eastern States, the West constituted a model to follow: while the democratic system was not entirely understood by their population, capitalism was the synonym of accessibility to goods and services superior to those having been on the Eastern market during the Cold War. They generally perceived the West to have a higher level of “civilization”.