

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

By George Friedman
November 8, 2010

Geopolitical Journey

Part 1: The Traveler

I try to keep my writing impersonal. My ideas are my own, of course, but I prefer to keep myself out of it for three reasons. First, I'm far less interesting than my writings are. Second, the world is also far more interesting than my writings and me, and pretending otherwise is narcissism. Finally, while I founded STRATFOR, I am today only part of it. My thoughts derive from my discussions and arguments with the STRATFOR team. Putting my name on articles seems like a mild form of plagiarism. When I do put my name on my articles (as Scott Stewart, Fred Burton and others sometimes do) it's because our marketing people tell us that we need to "put a face" on the company. I'm hard pressed to understand why anyone would want to see my face, or why showing it is good business, but I've learned never to argue with marketing.

I've said all of this to prepare you for a series of articles that will be personal in a sense, as they will be built around what I will be doing. My wife (who plans and organizes these trips with precision) and I are going to visit several countries over the next few weeks. My reasons for visiting them are geopolitical. These countries all find themselves sharing a geopolitical dilemma. Each country is fascinating in its own right, but geopolitics is what draws me to them now. I think it might be of some value to our readers if I shared my thoughts on these countries as I visit them. Geopolitics should be impersonal, yet the way we encounter the world is always personal. Andre Malraux once said that we all

leave our countries in very national ways. A Korean visiting Paris sees it differently than an American. The personal is the eccentric core of geopolitics.

There are those who travel to sample wine and others who travel to experience art and others to enjoy the climate. I travel to sample the political fault lines in the world, and I have done this all my life. This is an odd preference, but there might be some others who share it. Traveling geopolitically is not complex, but it does take some thought. I thought you might find my description of geopolitical travel interesting. It's how I think this series should start.

The geopolitical is about the intersection of geography and politics. It assumes that the political life of humans is shaped by the place in which they live and that the political patterns are frequently recurring because of the persistence of nations and the permanence of geography. I begin my travels by always re-reading histories and novels from the region. I avoid anything produced by a think tank, preferring old poems and legends. When I travel to a place, when I look at the geography and speak to the people, I find that there is a constant recurrence of history. In many places, a few centuries ago is like yesterday. Reading literature can be the best preparation for a discussion of a county's budget deficit. Every place and every conversation is embedded in the centuries and the rivers and mountains that shaped the people who shape the centuries.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and withdrew to the borders of old Muscovy, there were those who said that this was the end of the Russian empire. Nations and empires are living things until they die. While they live they grow to the limits set by other nations. They don't grow like this because they are evil. They do this because they are composed of humans who always want to be more secure, more prosperous and more respected. It is inconceivable to me that Russia, alive and unrestrained, would not seek to return to what it once was. The frontiers of Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union had reasons for being where they were, and in my mind, Russia would inevitably seek to return to its borders. This has nothing to do with leaders or policies. There is no New World Order, only the old one replaying itself in infinitely varying detail, like a kaleidoscope.

Our trip now is to countries within and near the Black Sea basin, so the geopolitical "theme" of the trip (yes, my trips have geopolitical themes, which my children find odd for some reason) is the Russian re-emergence as viewed by its western and southwestern neighbors: Turkey, Romania, Moldova, Poland and Ukraine. I was born in Hungary and have been there many times, so I don't need to go there this time, and I know Slovakia well. My goal is to understand how these other countries see and wish the present to be. It's not that I believe that their visions and hopes will shape the future — the world is not that accommodating — but because I want to see the degree to which my sense of what will happen and their sense of what will happen diverge.

This is the political theme of the trip, but when I look at these countries geographically, there are several other organizing themes as well. Turkey, Romania, Ukraine and in a way Moldova are all partly organized around the Black Sea and interact with each other

based on that. It's a sea of endless history. I am also visiting some of the countries in the Carpathian Mountains, a barrier that has divided the Russian empire from Europe for centuries, and which the Russians breached in World War II, partly defining the Cold War. Romania, Ukraine, Moldova and even southern Poland cannot be understood without understanding the role the Carpathians play in uniting them and dividing them. Finally, I am visiting part of the North European Plain, which stretches from France into Russia. It is the path Napoleon and Hitler took into Russia, and the path Russia took on its way to Berlin. Sitting on that plain is Poland, a country whose existence depends on the balance of power between other countries on the plain, a plain that provides few natural defenses to Poland and that has made Poland a victim many times over. I want to understand whether this time will be different and to find out whether the Poles realize that in order for things to be different the Poles themselves must be different, since the plain is not going to stop being flat.

Part of traveling geopolitically is the simple experience of a place. The luxury of a hotel room facing the Bosphorus, and me with a drink in hand and the time to watch the endless line of ships passing through the narrow straits, teaches me more about Alexander's conquests, Britain's invasion of Gallipoli or Truman's obsession with Turkey than all the books I've read and maps I've pored over. Walking a mountain path in the Carpathians in November, where bandits move about today as they did centuries ago, teaches me why this region will never be completely tamed or easily captured. A drive through the Polish countryside near Warsaw will remind me why Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin took the path they did, and why Poland thinks the way it does.

The idea of seeing geographical reality is not confined to this trip. I recall visiting Lake Itasca in Minnesota, where the Mississippi River begins, following it to St. Louis, where the Missouri flows into it, and then going down to New Orleans, where the goods are transferred between river barges and ocean-going vessels. Nothing taught me more about American power and history than taking that trip and watching the vast traffic in grain and steel move up and down the river. It taught me why Andrew Jackson fought at New Orleans and why he wanted Texas to rebel against Mexico. It explained to me why Mark Twain, in many ways, understood America more deeply than anyone.

In visiting countries of the Black Sea basin, I am fortunate that a number of political leaders and members of the media are willing to meet with me. Although not something new, this access still startles me. When I was younger, far less savory people wanted to make my acquaintance. A cup of coffee and serious conversation in a warm office with influential people is still for me a rite of passage.

These visits have their own dangers, different from older dangers in younger days. Political leaders think in terms of policies and options. Geopolitics teaches us to think in terms of constraints and limits. According to geopolitics, political leaders are trapped by impersonal forces and have few options in the long run. Yet, in meeting with men and women who have achieved power in their country, the temptation is to be caught up in their belief in what they are going to do. There is a danger of being caught up in their passion and confidence. There is also the danger of being so dogmatic about geopolitics

that ignoring their vision blinds me to possibilities that I haven't thought of or that can't simply be explained geopolitically. Obviously, I want to hear what they have to say, and this trip presents a rare and precious opportunity. But these meetings always test my ability to maintain my balance.

I should add that I make it a practice to report neither whom I meet with nor what they say. I learn much more this way and can convey a better sense of what is going on. The direct quote can be the most misleading thing in the world. People ask me about STRATFOR's sources. I find that we can be more effective in the long run by not revealing those sources. Announcing conversations with the great is another path to narcissism. Revealing conversations with the less than great can endanger them. Most important, a conversation that is private is more human and satisfying than a conversation that will be revealed to many people. Far better to absorb what I learn and let it inform my own writing than to replicate what reporters will do far better than I can. I am not looking for the pithy quote, but for the complex insight that never quite reduces itself to a sentence or two.

There is another part of geopolitical travel that is perhaps the most valuable: walking the streets of a city. Geopolitics affect every level of society, shaping life and culture. Walking the streets, if you know what to look for, can tell you a great deal. Don't go to where the monuments and museums are, and don't go to where the wealthy live. They are the least interesting and the most globally homogenized. They are personally cushioned against the world. The poor and middle class are not. If a Montblanc store is next to a Gucci shop, you are in the wrong place.

Go to the places where the people you will never hear of live. Find a school and see the children leave at the end of the day. You want the schools where there is pushing and shoving and where older brothers come to walk their sisters home. You are now where you should be. Look at their shoes. Are they old or new? Are they local or from the global market? Are they careful with them as if they were precious or casual with them as they kick a ball around? Watch children play after school and you can feel the mood and tempo of a neighborhood.

Find a food store. Look at the food being offered, particularly fruits and vegetables. Are they fresh-looking? What is the selection? Look at the price and calculate it against what you know about earnings. Then watch a woman (yes, it is usually a woman) shopping for groceries. Does she avoid the higher priced items and buy the cheapest? Does she stop to look at the price, returning a can or box after looking, or does she simply place it in her basket or cart without looking at the price? When she pays for the food, is she carefully reaching into an envelope in her pocketbook where she stores her money, or does she casually pull out some bills? Watch five women shopping for food in the late afternoon and you will know how things are there.

Go past the apartments people live in. Smell them. The unhealthy odor of decay or sewage tells you about what they must endure in their lives. Are there banks in the neighborhood? If not, there isn't enough business there to build one. The people are

living paycheck to paycheck. In the cafes where men meet, are they older men, retired? Or are they young men? Are the cafes crowded with men in their forties drinking tea or coffee, going nowhere? Are they laughing and talking or sitting quietly as if they have nothing left to say? Official figures on unemployment can be off a number of ways. But when large numbers of 40-year-old men have nothing to do, then the black economy — the one that pays no taxes and isn't counted by the government but is always there and important — isn't pulling the train. Are the police working in pairs or alone? What kind of weapons do they carry? Are they everywhere, nowhere or have just the right presence? There are endless things you can learn if you watch.

All of this should be done unobtrusively. Take along clothes that are a bit shabby. Buy a pair of shoes there, scuff them up and wear them. Don't speak. The people can smell foreigners and will change their behavior when they sense them. Blend in and absorb. At the end of a few days you will understand the effects of the world on these people.

On this I have a surreal story to tell. My wife and I were in Istanbul a few months ago. I was the guest of the mayor of Istanbul, and his office had arranged a lecture I was to give. After many meetings, we found ourselves with free time and went out to walk the city. We love these times. The privacy of a crowded street is a delight. As we walked along we suddenly stopped. There, on a large billboard, was my face staring down at us. We also discovered posters advertising my lecture. We slunk back to our hotel. Fortunately, I am still sufficiently obscure that no one will remember me, so this time we will try our walk again.

There are three things the geopolitical traveler must do. He must go to places and force himself to see the geography that shapes everything. He must meet with what leaders he can find who will talk to him in all parts of society, listening and talking but reserving a part of his mind for the impersonal reality of the world. Finally, he must walk the streets. He won't have time to meet the schoolteachers, bank tellers, government employees and auto repairmen who are the substance of a society. Nor will they be comfortable talking to a foreigner. But geopolitics teaches that you should ignore what people say and watch what they do.

Geopolitics is everywhere. Look at the patterns of an American election and you will see it at work. I would like, at some point, to have the leisure to study the geopolitics of the United States in detail. But geopolitics is most useful in understanding conflict, and therefore the geopolitical traveler will be drawn to places where tensions are high. That's a pity, but life places the important above the interesting.

In future pieces, I will be writing about the region I am visiting in a way more familiar to our readers. The next one will be about the region as a whole. The series will replace my weekly geopolitical analyses for several weeks, but I hope you will find it of value. By all means, let us know what you think. We do read all of your emails, even if there isn't time to answer them. So what you say can help shape this series as well as our work in general.

Editor's note: This is the second installment in a series of special reports that Dr. Friedman will write over the next few weeks as he travels to Turkey, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Poland. In this series, he will share his observations of the geopolitical imperatives in each country and conclude with reflections on his journey as a whole and options for the United States.

Part 2: Borderlands

November 9, 2010

A borderland is a region where history is constant: Everything is in flux. The countries we are visiting on this trip (Turkey, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and Poland) occupy the borderland between Islam, Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity. Roman Catholic Hapsburg Austria struggled with the Islamic Ottoman Empire for centuries, with the Ottomans extending northwest until a climactic battle in Vienna in 1683. Beginning in the 18th century, Orthodox Russia expanded from the east, through Belarus and Ukraine. For more than two centuries, the belt of countries stretching from the Baltic to the Black seas was the borderland over which three empires fought.

There have been endless permutations here. The Cold War was the last clear-cut confrontation, pitting Russia against a Western Europe backed — and to a great extent dominated — by the United States. This belt of countries was firmly if informally within the Soviet empire. Now they are sovereign again. My interest in the region is to understand more clearly how the next iteration of regional geopolitics will play out. Russia is far more powerful than it was 10 years ago. The European Union is undergoing internal stress and Germany is recalculating its position. The United States is playing an uncertain and complex game. I want to understand how the semicircle of powers, from Turkey to Poland, are thinking about and positioning themselves for the next iteration of the regional game.

I have been accused of thinking like an old Cold warrior. I don't think that's true. The Soviet Union has collapsed, and U.S. influence in Europe has declined. Whatever will come next will not be the Cold War. What I do not expect this to be is a region of perpetual peace. It has never been that before. It will not be that in the future. I want to understand the pattern of conflict that will occur in the future. But for that we need to begin in the past, not with the Cold War, but with World War I.

Regional Reshaping after World War I

World War I created a radically new architecture in this region. The Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires collapsed, the Russian empire was replaced by the Soviet Union, and the German empire was overthrown and replaced by a republic. No region in the world suffered more or was left more impoverished by the war than this region. Indeed, the war didn't end for them in 1918. It went on as the grip of empires reluctantly subsided and the new nations struggled within and among themselves.

The collapse of empires allowed a range of nations to emerge as independent nations. From the Baltic states to Bulgaria, nations became nation-states. Many of the borders and some of the nations were fixed by the victorious powers at Versailles and Trianon. They invented Yugoslavia, which means “land of the southern Slavs,” out of a collection of hostile nations. They reshaped their borders. If France, Britain and the United States shaped the region, the Poles saved it.

The border between the Russian empire/Soviet Union and Europe is divided into two parts. The Carpathian Mountains form a rough boundary between the Russians and the rest of Europe from Slovakia to the south. These mountains are not particularly tall, but they are rugged, with scattered villages and few good roads. The Carpathians have belonged at various times to all of the countries in the region, but the Carpathians are not easily controlled. Even today, bandits rule parts of it. It is not impossible to move an army across it, but it is not easy, either.

The northern part of Europe is dominated by a vast plain stretching from France to Moscow. It is flat and marshy to the north but generally good terrain for armies to move on. Except for some river barriers, it is the route of Europe’s conquerors. Napoleon moved along the plain to Moscow, as did Hitler (who moved across the Caucasus as well). Stalin returned the way Napoleon and Hitler came.

The Intermarium

Following World War I, Poland re-emerged as a sovereign nation. The Soviet Union had capitulated to Germany in 1917 and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, which ceded a great deal of territory, including Ukraine, to Germany. With Germany’s defeat, Brest-Litovsk lost its force and the Russians tried to regain what they had given away in that treaty. Part of that was Poland. In 1920, a climactic battle took place in Warsaw, when an army led by Polish Gen. Jozef Pilsudski, who had struck an alliance with Ukraine that couldn’t work, blocked a Soviet invasion.

Pilsudski is an interesting figure, a reactionary in some ways, a radical in others. But it was his geopolitical vision that interests me. He was, above all else, a Polish nationalist, and he understood that Russia’s defeat by Germany was the first step to an independent Poland. He also believed that Polish domination of Ukraine — an ancient ploy — would guarantee Poland’s freedom after Germany was defeated. His attempt to ally with Ukraine failed. The Russians defeated the Ukrainians and turned on Poland. Pilsudski defeated them.

It is interesting to speculate about history if Pilsudski had lost Warsaw. The North European Plain was wide open, and the Soviets could have moved into Germany. Undoubtedly, the French would have moved to block them, but there was a powerful Communist Party in France that had little stomach for war. It could have played out many different ways had Pilsudski not stopped the Russians. But he did.

Pilsudski had another idea. Germany was in shambles, as was Russia, but both would be back. An alliance in place before they revived would, in Pilsudski's mind, save the region. His vision was something called the Intermarium — an alliance of the nations between the seas built around Poland and including Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Finland and the Baltic states. This never came to be, but if it had, World War II may never have happened or could have played out in a different way. It is an idea that has been in my mind of late, thinking about what comes after NATO and ambitious concepts of European federation. Pilsudski's Intermarium makes a kind of logical if not historical sense. It is not historical because this borderland has always been the battleground for others. It has never formed together to determine its fate.

The Russian-German Relationship

In many ways, this matter doesn't rest in these states' hands. It depends partly on what Russia wants and plans to do and it depends on what Europe wants and plans to do. As always, the Intermarium is caught between Russia and Europe. There is no southern European power at the moment (the Austro-Hungarian empire is a memory), but in the north there is Germany, a country struggling to find its place in Europe and in history.

In many ways, Germany is the mystery. The 2008 Greek crisis shocked the Germans. They had seen the European Union as the solution to European nationalism and an instrument of prosperity. When the crisis struck, the Germans found that nationalism had reared its head in Germany as much as it had in other countries. The Germans didn't want to bail out the Greeks, and the entire question of the price and value of the European Union became a central issue in Germany. Germany has not thought of itself as a freestanding power since 1945. It is beginning to think that way again, and that could change everything, depending on where it goes.

One of the things it could change is German-Russian relations. At various times since 1871 and German re-unification, the Germans and Russians have been allies as well as mortal enemies. Right now, there is logic in closer German-Russian ties. Economically they complement and need each other. Russia exports raw materials; Germany exports technology. Neither cares to be pressured by the United States. Together they might be able to resist that pressure. There is a quiet romance under way between them.

And that rivets my attention on the countries I am visiting. For Poland, the specter of a German-Russian entente is a historical nightmare. The last time this happened, in 1939, Poland was torn apart and lost its sovereignty for 50 years. There is hardly a family in Poland who can't name their dead from that time. Of course, it is said that this time it would be different, that the Germans are no longer what they were and neither are the Russians. But geopolitics teaches that subjective inclinations do not erase historical patterns. Whatever the Poles think and say, they must be nervous although they are not admitting it. Admitting fear of Germany and Russia would be to admit distrust, and distrust is not permitted in modern Europe. Still, the Poles know history, and it will be

good to see what they have to say — or at least how they say it. And it is of the greatest importance to hear what they say and don't say about the United States under these circumstances.

Romania's Role

The Romanians are in a different position. The Romanians are buffered against the Russians by Ukraine and Moldova, and their sense of unease should be lower. Unlike the Poles and the North European Plain, they at least have the Carpathians running through their country. But what are we to make of Ukraine? Their government is pro-Russian and trapped by economic realities into strong Russian ties. Certainly, the increasingly German-led European Union is not going to come to their rescue. The question in Ukraine is whether their attempt to achieve complete independence is over, to be replaced by some informal but iron bond to Russia, or whether the Ukrainians still have room to maneuver. It seems from a distance that there is little room for them to breathe, let alone maneuver, but this is a question to be put to Ukrainians. They will, of course, vigorously assert their independence, but it will be important to listen to what is not said and what is answered by small shrugs and resignation. There is no more important question in Europe at the moment than the future of Ukraine.

For Romania, this is vital because its buffer could turn into its boundary if the Russians return to the border. This is why Moldova matters as well. Moldova used to be called Bessarabia. When Stalin made his deal with Hitler in 1939, part of the deal was that Bessarabia, then part of Romania, an ally of Germany, would be seized by the Soviets. This moved Romania farther from the port of Odessa, the critical port on the Black Sea, and across the Dniester River. Bessarabia remained part of the Soviet Union after the war. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Moldova became independent, stretching from Romania to the eastern bank of the Dniester. The area east of the Dniester, Transdnestrria, promptly seceded from Moldova, with Russian help. Moldova became a Romanian-speaking buffer on the Dniester River.

Moldova is the poorest country in Europe. Its primary export is wine, sent mostly to Russia. The Russians have taken to blocking the export of wine for "health reasons." I think the health issue is geopolitical and not biological. If Moldova is an independent, pro-European state, Ukraine is less isolated than the Russians would like it to be. Moldova could, in the distant future, be a base for operations against Russian interests. Every inch that potential enemies are from Odessa is beneficial. There was a reason why Stalin wanted to take Bessarabia from Hitler. That consideration has not dissolved, and the Russians are acting to isolate and pressure Moldova right now and, with it, Romania.

My visit to Romania and Moldova is to try to get a sense of how they view the situation in Ukraine, what they think Russian intentions are and what they plan to do — if anything. Romania is always a hard country to read. Geopolitically, its capital is on the wrong side of the Carpathians if the Russians are the threat, on the right side if Austria or Germany is the threat. Romania is oriented toward the European Union but is one of the many countries in the union that may not really belong there. Unlike the Poles, for whom

history and resistance is a tradition, the Romanians accommodate themselves to the prevailing winds. It will be good to find out where they feel the winds are blowing from right now. I doubt that they will do anything to save Moldova and anger Moscow, but it is not clear whether Moldova is in danger. Still, this much is clear: If the Russians are reclaiming Ukraine, then Moldova is an important piece of territory, not only to protect Ukraine but also to create options toward Romania and southwestern Europe. Sometimes small pieces of land that are not on anyone's mind represent the test case.

Turkey is a place I have gone to several times in the past few years and expect to revisit many times. In my book, "The Next 100 Years," I argued that Turkey will be a great power in the next 50 years or so. I'm comfortable with my long-term prediction, but the next decade will be a period of transition for Turkey, from being one of the countries confronting the Soviets under the U.S. alliance system to being a resurgent power in its own right. It will be no one's pawn, and it will be asserting its interests beyond its borders. Indeed, as its power increases in the Balkans, Turkey will be one of the forces that countries like Romania will have to face.

I will be interested in hearing from the Romanians and Moldovans what their view of Turkey is at this point. Its re-emergence will be a slow process, with inevitable setbacks and disappointments, but even now its commercial influence can be felt in the Black Sea basin. I will be interested in hearing from the Turks how they view the Russians (and, of course, Iran and the Arab countries as well as Central Asia). Russia as seen through the eyes of its neighbors is the purpose of this trip, and that's the conversation I will want to have. Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians and Moldovans will all want to talk about Russia. The Turks will want to discuss many issues, Russia perhaps least of all. I will have to work hard to draw them out on this.

A Geopolitical Theory

In the end, I am going to the region with an analytic framework, a theory that I will want to test. It is a theory that argues that the post-Cold War world is ending. Russia is re-emerging in a historically recognizable form. Germany is just beginning the process of redefining itself in Europe, and the EU's weaknesses have become manifest. Turkey has already taken the first steps toward becoming a regional power. We are at the beginning of a period in which these forces play themselves out.

For the United States, Turkey's emergence is beneficial. The United States is ending its wars in the region, and Turkey is motivated to fill the vacuum left and combat radical Islam. Those who argue that the Turkish government is radically Islamist are simply wrong, for two reasons. First, Turkey is deeply divided, with the powerful heirs of the secular traditions of Kemal Ataturk on one side. They are too strong to have radical Islam imposed on them. Second, the Islamism of the Turkish government cannot possibly be compared to that of Saudi Arabia, for example. Islam comes in many hues, as does Christianity, and the Turkish version derives from Ottoman history. It is subtle, flexible and above all pragmatic. It derives from a history in which Turkish Islam was allied with

Catholic Venice to dominate the Mediterranean. So Turkish Islam is not strong enough to impose itself on the secularists and too urbane to succumb to simplistic radicalism. It will do what it has to do, but helping al Qaeda is not on its agenda. Still, it will be good to talk to the secularists, who regard the current government with fear and distrust, and see whether they remain as brittle as ever.

While the United States can welcome a powerful Turkey, the same can't be said for a powerful Russia, particularly not one allied with Germany. The single greatest American fear should not be China or al Qaeda. It is the amalgamation of the European Peninsula's technology with Russia's natural resources. That would create a power that could challenge American primacy. That was what the 20th century was all about. The German-Russian relationship, however early and subdued it might be, must affect the United States.

It is not clear to me that the American leadership understands this. Washington's mind is an amalgam of post-Cold War cliches about Russia and Europe and an obsession with terrorism. This is not a time of clear strategic thinking in Washington. I find it irritating to go there, since they regard my views as alarmist and extreme while I find their views outmoded and simplistic. It's why I like Austin. I know that the Poles, for example, are deeply concerned that Washington doesn't understand the issues. But in the United States, Washington makes position papers and only rarely history. The United States is a vast nation, and Washington thinks of itself as its center, but it really isn't. The United States doesn't have a center. The pressures of the world and the public shape its actions, albeit reluctantly.

I have no power to shape anything, but for Washington to support Poland they need to be shown a path. In this case, I am going to explore the theory that Pilsudski brought to the table, of the Intermarium. I regard NATO as a bureaucracy overseeing an alliance whose mission was accomplished 20 years ago. From an American point of view, moving France or Germany is both impossible and pointless. They have their own interests and the wrong geography. It is the Intermarium — Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and perhaps Bulgaria — that represents this generation's alliance. It blocks the Russians, splits them from the Germans and gently limits Turkey's encroachment in southeastern Europe.

The Intermarium countries remain infatuated with the European Union and NATO, but the infatuation is declining. The year 2008 and Germany's indifference to these countries was not pleasant, and they are learning that NATO is history. The Poles must be the leader of the bloc and the Romanians the southern anchor. I think the Poles are thinking in these terms but the Romanians are far from this idea. I'm not sure. I want to find out. For me, a U.S.-backed Poland guarding the North European Plain, with Slovakia, Hungary and Romania guarding the Carpathian approaches, would prevent what the United States should fear the most: an alliance between Russia and Germany plus Western Europe. The key is the changing perception of the European Union in the Intermarium. I want to see how far this has come.

Nothing, of course, could be further from Washington's mind. Washington still thinks of Russia as the failed state of the 1990s. It simply doesn't take it seriously. It thinks of the European Union as having gone over a speed bump from which it will recover. But mostly, Washington thinks about Afghanistan. For completely understandable reasons, Afghanistan sucks up the bandwidth of Washington, allowing the rest of the world to maneuver as it wishes.

As I said, I have no power to shape anything. But it is the charm of the United States that powerlessness and obscurity is no bar to looking at the world and thinking of what will come next. I am not making strategy but examining geopolitical forces. I am not planning what should be but thinking about what will likely happen. But in doing this I need a reality check, and for this reality check I will start in Romania.