

George Friedman's geopolitical myths from Polish perspective

On December 3 2010 the well known American analytical center STRATFOR has published on its website the seventh essay by Dr. George Friedman in the cycle *Geopolitical Journey with George Friedman*. This time Poland was targeted by the American think-tank chief. It is not the place to describe to readers the figure of Friedman and the analytical center that he runs. It is worth mentioning that STRATFOR defines itself as a private center, specializing in geopolitical intelligence. It is an open secret, that US foreign policy is actively supported by private foundations, societies and companies. Their role is to influence the public and political and intellectual elite of allies, potential allies and of course enemies of USA. Those institutions are used as an instrument of "soft pressure" and are commonly used in the informational war, or to be more precise – netwar.

The term netwar was coined and popularized by John Arquille and David Ronfeldt, analyst of another powerful American think-tank – RAND Corporation. Generally speaking, it is used to describe conflicts of small intensity, where the main weapons is information, or specifically the level of its popularization. The goal of a netwar is to have an advantage in the informational sphere in such a way that allows to shape the global public opinion. In order to achieve it, it is necessary to create a web effect, that allows the publication of a given message according to the "snowball law". This way obviously leads to losing control over the created message, but its goal is not only the publication of a given position, but the relativization of one dominating point of view. The aim is to lead to social and political approval of the existence of determined positions, or to question their right of existence. Netwar is inseparably bound with IT revolution and often occurs alongside traditional armed conflicts. An example is the war of USA and its allies against Iraq, Yugoslavia or Afghanistan. Washington by use of powerful governmental and non-governmental structures led to a peculiar "net legitimization" of their expansionist policy, thanks to messages depicting USA as the "guarantor of world peace" and "protector from global terrorism". The main meta-method of conduction a web war is the widely understood manipulation.

Modern geopolitics is often divided into formal geopolitics (academic, theoretical), practical geopolitics and popular geopolitics. The first is the domain of intellectual circles and focuses on scientific basis of this discipline. Practical geopolitics is the result of the actions of political elites, diplomacy and the whole apparatus belonging to the country and international organizations. Finally, popular geopolitics, nothing new as distributing by mass media and mass culture the ideas concerning political space. In this area we deal with the so-called geopolitical codes, that is a specific kind of a "mental map" on which the allies and enemies are highlighted, it shapes the image of borders (not necessarily the real ones, often the desired ones), in other words it creates the political identity. Geopolitical codes as a basic weapon in popular geopolitics are a successfully used tool in netwar, which can be seen in the foreign and internal policy of the United States.

"Poles aren't an organized country, therefore the mood is more important among them than reasoning and arguments; the art of ruling Poles is therefore based on arousing proper mood". The essence of those words, said once by marshal Joseph Pilsudski was perfectly adapted by George Friedman. Because he started his disquisition from a beautifully sounding for the Poles, comparison "to understand Poland, you must understand Frederic Chopin". This comparison has become the background, sort of an emotional fabric for the argumentation and the most important motion coming from the American political scientist. At the backbone of his statement the STRATFOR's chief made a geopolitical code rooted in Polish consciousness for a long time and still shaping it, that can be described as the double-sided endangering of Poland by Germany and Russia.

A characteristic item, the American political scientist starts to spin his thought on the history of Poland from the November Uprising (!), time after time pointing to the "Russian danger" or "German danger". He emphasizes the "poor" but brave Poland was often betrayed. He pays honor to Polish military that led a cavalry charge against tanks (sic!), but was a sign of "great symbolism", whatever it means. The myth of Polish cavalry soldiers charging German tanks is a very common form of manipulating the historical consciousness - not only of the Polish recipient –made by the hand of an American propaganda officer. The aim of such an action is to retain the image of heroic Poles, that were in danger of the East-West axis for hundreds of years, and to make things even worse – constantly betrayed. It fits perfectly the historical code established in Poland, at the basis of which lies the martyrdom image of the history of Poland. In the past few years this vision has been often used by political elites with its disgraceful apogee after the catastrophe in Smolensk. Friedman perfectly senses the Polish attitudes and weaknesses, brilliantly adding point to the political activity of Poland in the last 200 years travestying the title of Ivan Morris' book as "nobility of failure".

However the chief of STRATFOR notices that since the end of the cold war the geopolitical situation has changed and Germany and Russia do not threaten Polish sovereignty, at least directly, however he adds that "all countries change their intentions" which he illustrates with the colorful example of Germany from the 1932-1934 period. By describing the historical failures of Poles, Friedman does not give us any chances for geopolitical stabilization even within the European Union, because – as he states – 18 year old union doesn't give any chances of creating a "calm kingdom of heaven". "Chopin can be understood geopolitically" – Friedman continues. In fact, STRATFOR's chief with the lightness of Chopin's mazurek "proves" that Poland has no exit of its geopolitical situation than relying on an alliance with the Big Brother from across the sea. What a brilliant observation! A discovery of an epoch. In order to strengthen his "geopolitical" argumentation Friedman states that in the XX century USA stopped three times Germany, Russia or the alliance of both those countries. That's why Poland "has to maintain contact with the global hegemonic leader". The American political scientist in the rhythm of Chopin's polonaises shows Poland its place in Europe that will be based in the new *Intermarium* under the watchful supervision of Uncle Sam. It is a repetition of known PR moves used in the strongly advertised book "The next 100 years", where Friedman created a vision very pleasant for Polish ears, but totally impossible in the modern world, the vision of the superpower at the Vistula and "Polish Block".

One has to underline, that the main axis of Friedman's manipulation is the almost total ignorance of the European Union as an independent center of power and examining the reality only from the perspective of nationalist countries, which is a certain anachronism. Hence the so strongly forcing the geopolitical code, according to which Poland, exactly like in the interwar period, is endangered by the Berlin-Moscow axis. Such attempts to frighten with the German-Russian block is an inseparable element of Washington's influence over the Polish establishment.

The style of reasoning of the STRATFOR's boss is nothing new. It is a well-known note played from the end of the cold war by American propagandists. It bases on Polish weaknesses, historical complexes, the lack of category thinking *Realpolitik*, dredging old stereotypes, creating new ones, shortly speaking – on playing with Polish moods. To simplify, it creates an impression of the eternal Russian-German threat towards Poland and the vision of the American liberator, that is becoming the only guarantor of the Polish sovereignty. The competent referring to Polish myths and illusions (messianism, bulwark), antiquarian, but still fashionable geopolitical concepts (*Intermarium*) and consolidating wrong geopolitical codes, allows the American diplomacy to effectively divide the idea of the integrated Europe. For Washington, the divided Europe is better, with American bases on "the old continent", than the independent Europe, military self-

sufficient, able to conduct its own politics, not dependent on the American politics vision, based on the transatlantic union myth. The American diplomacy, using tools of the network war, has effectively introduced to the international circulation the division of the European Union members into „old“ and „new“ ones, whose interests should diametrically differ. It is worth noticing, that geopolitical codes, propagated by the American administration, and which were enthusiastically applauded after 1989 by the Polish *establishment*, are based on very fragile bases, myths, misinterpretations, not to say it directly, manipulations.

Myth no. 1: 'The Polish threat has, from centuries, proceeded on the East-West axis', or directly – from Germany and Russia. In its couple of centuries history, the Polish centre of power was endangered simultaneously from two opposite sides, and only twice on the East-West axis (2 half of the XVIII century and I half of the XX century), the rest constitutes threats on the North-South axis (XIV and XVII centuries). It should definitely be underlined that the liquidation of the Polish statehood was each time the result not of the geographical situation, but of the potential disproportion. Extreme geographical determinism propagated by Friedman and his adherents has no historical bases.

Myth no. 2: 'The European Union cannot be the safety and stabilization guarantor in Europe without the support of the United States'. It is precisely the other way round, that Dr. Friedman would like. The European Union will become the reliable guarantor of the European safety, when it will cut off the NATO's umbilical cord and will become fully military self-sufficient and sovereign in the foreign politics. The USA resembles the overprotective parent, who is trying to do everything for its child, and thus harming him. Europe doesn't need the Atlantic safety system, but the effective Eurasian system, with regional subsystems (e.g. Mediterranean, East European, Balkan, etc.), based on powers of the European subcontinent and cooperation with the closest located superpower, that is Russia.

Myth no. 3: 'German-Russian closeness is a threat to Europe's safety'. An attempt of driving a car is based only on the view from the rear-view mirror, which usually ends tragically. Looking at the current reality and analyzing it from the point of view of the pre-war reality is more than a mistake, it is the lack of imagination. Processes, which result from the information revolution (among others: denationalization of foreign politics, shaping the post sovereign countries, fall of the idea of national superpowers and ethno-national imperialisms), force us to look differently at current geopolitical changes. The synthesis of Europe's "soft power" and Russia's „hard power“ gives a chance to create a modern safety system on the area of Eurasia and breaking the previous barriers.

Myth no. 4: 'Poland is condemned to the alliance with the USA'. Geography doesn't determine the history, it only creates chances. An old saying, and also one of the principal geopolitical recommendations, makes us look for our enemies far away, and our allies near. Polish foreign politics after 1989 is its literal contradiction. The 'Euro-Atlantic strategy' became the principal paradigm, whatever this means. This 'strategy' comes to the lack of strategy, to the fact of 'sitting on two stools', one in Brussels, and the second one in Washington. Misquoting the above mentioned Joseph Pilsudski (*nota bene* a person subjected to peculiar hagiography in the modern Poland, eagerly used to „legitimize“ the rodomontade in the foreign politics), it can be stated that Poland will soon fall from one of these stools.

From the point of view of geopolitics, one of the main strategic challenges for Polish power centre should be the pursuit to provide the stabilization and safety on the area of the Central and Eastern Europe and the implication of the European integration in such a direction, which will allow the European power centre to fulfil its role as one of the most important superpowers in the times of the polycentring light. The rowdy politics of driving a wedge between countries of the Western and Eastern Europe and politics turned towards the confrontation of the EU with Russia will not provide Polish citizens with safety.

The initiation by Polish diplomacy of the peculiar in its assumptions (aimed *par excellence* against Russia) programme of the „Eastern Partnership”, which in geopolitical antecedences is directly in the pre-war ‘Promethean’ politics (calculated towards the rolling of the Russian power centre ‘along the national seams’), is neither good for the European integration nor the safety of Poland. There is no more urgent issue for safety, not only for Poland but also for the whole Central and Eastern Europe, than the Ukrainian ‘bolt of destabilization’. Poland, with its short-sighted politics, support for the anti-Polish, Nazification political groups in Ukraine, has caused a threat towards its own and European safety. Today, the ‘Eastern Partnership’ should be directed in the geopolitical spirit, in accordance with interests of the whole European Union, so that it can be used, in agreement with Russia, to solve real problems, and not to create destabilization spheres. The perspective of cooperation of the EU with Russia creates new chances for the harmony of growth on the area of the whole Eurasia. Poland should initiate safety and stabilization processes in our part of the continent based on the integrated powers of Europe.

It is not the geographical location ‘between Germany and Russia’ that is a threat to Poland, but the irresponsible, effusive Polish politics, sticking with one leg at the beginning of the XX century, and even in the XIX century, not taking into consideration geopolitical economic situations, feeding on native ‘wishful thinking’ and national myths. Creation of main vectors of Polish foreign politics by ‘dead visa passengers’, trying to fulfil the antiquarian visions from the previous century, at specialists’ bidding, like Dr. George Friedman, trying to ‘play’ the integrating Europe, may lead to geopolitical destabilization of our part of the continent. We should remember that wrong interpretation of geopolitical processes, transmission of evaluations from the previous century to modern realities, leads directly to the catastrophe. In this sense, paraphrasing words of Joseph Szujski, we can say that ‘false geopolitics becomes the master of false politics’.

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