



Silviu Petre, *Gulliveri și Liliputani: un excurs pe marginea micilor puteri din sistemul internațional (Gullivers and Lilliputians: An Excursus on Small Powers in the International System)* Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2025, 194 p., presented by Bogdan GHEORGHITĂ

Today, international relations are undergoing a process of reconstruction. The complex dynamics that followed the end of the Cold War raise a series of questions to which we are still seeking answers: How will the international system be restructured? Will China's rise materialize into a solid pole of economic and military power in the coming period, or will the Eastern colossus wait longer for a more favourable moment? What role will smaller states play: will they have a voice, or will they be reduced to "geopolitical silence" amid the confrontation of the major actors on the international stage?

For some of these questions, answers seem to be taking shape. For others, however, we are still unable to foresee a clear response. At present, we operate more with uncertainties than with certainties. We hypothesize, analyse, and attempt to anticipate developments. The violent conflicts erupting in various corners of the world are themselves signs of these ongoing realignments. Understanding the way in which the international system is being reconfigured is therefore a necessity not only for academia, but also for political decision-makers and institutions whose field of activity concerns this domain. Moreover, history teaches us that those who were unprepared for change have often suffered the most from its consequences.

The volume *Gullivers and Lilliputians: An Excursus on Small Powers in the International System*, published by Military Publishing House¹ in 2025 and authored by Silviu Petre, represents a comprehensive undertaking aimed at examining the current dynamics of international relations, clarifying emerging trends, and offering new analytical directions.

The analogy between Gulliver and the Lilliputians is a classic metaphor used in geopolitics and international relations to describe the disproportionate interaction between great powers (or superpowers) and small or medium-sized states in the international system. The work is divided into three parts, and its point of departure, as the author himself acknowledges, lies in an undergraduate thesis defended more than fifteen years ago—a sign that his interest has endured despite the multiple transformations that have reshaped the international arena. The observations underpinning the author's approach provide a rather accurate diagnosis of the world in which we live: the attempt of the nation-state to remain relevant today, the struggle among great powers to restructure the geopolitical axis, the ambition to transition toward a green economy, as well as ongoing ideological realignments and polarizations. One of the declared aims of the volume is pedagogical in nature, namely to assist students by clarifying concepts and trends within a field characterized by significant dynamism. The book first discusses the structure of the international system, then focuses on relations among powers, before introducing the issue of state fragmentation.

The author, Silviu Petre, writes with sincerity, openly acknowledging the limitations of the volume while also clarifying the importance of his undertaking. Following in the tradition of introductory works in the field of International Relations Theory published in recent years in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, yet focusing more specifically on power relations, Silviu Petre also allows himself the freedom of personal reflections woven into the broader argumentative structure. This feature further highlights the essayistic character of the work.

¹ The cover was retrieved from <https://edituramilitara.ro/produs/gulliveri-si-liliputani-un-excurs-pe-marginea-micilor-puteri-din-sistemul-international/>

Part I also introduces the principal aim of the volume: the investigation of the role and significance of small powers. Adopting the realist perspective within International Relations theory in order to engage with the problem of power, the work proposes a dialogue between the perspectives of Raymond Aron and Kenneth N. Waltz in order to provide answers regarding the manner in which small powers (“Lilliputians”) operate within the international system. Proceeding methodically, the author offers convincing arguments for the selection of these two theorists within the context of his undertaking, as well as for the dialogue established between their respective perspectives. Moreover, the volume succeeds in clearly defining the concepts with which it operates, leaving little room for ambiguity. By testing his hypotheses through two analytical models, Silviu Petre concludes the first part of the work with an evident observation: “great powers participate alongside small ones in shaping a particular international order, albeit in an asymmetrical manner” (76).

The second part begins by identifying the themes that have structured the analysis of International Relations: the “end of history” and the “clash of civilizations.” Drawing on the writings of Francis Fukuyama and Samuel P. Huntington, the author argues that these theories require updating. In this regard, the new structure of the international system is envisioned through a bi-multipolar perspective, with the United States and China occupying the principal roles, while being accompanied by secondary or regional powers.

This paper advances the argument that, alongside the nation-state, regions and transnational communities are becoming increasingly significant within the sphere of international relations. One idea put forward by the volume is the establishment, in Romania, of a group of experts tasked with proposing concrete ways of promoting the country’s national interests within the context of a bipolar structure. In this respect, the author proposes two terms: “bipolarists” or “bipolarologists.” The latter term—or perhaps an improved version of it—appears more appropriate, since the former tends to evoke associations more closely related to the field of psychology.

Another noteworthy idea advanced by the volume is the introduction of migration as a subject within International Relations

theory. Equally important, the work also addresses conspiracy theory in international relations. The military-industrial complex and the “deep state” are the two concepts associated with conspiracy theory in this context, and the text approaches the issue in both a courageous and balanced manner. The author examines the subject against the backdrop of a postmodern conflict that now permeates society as a whole. Last but not least, the volume also proposes a discussion on the intelligence cycle and international politics.

The third and final part of the volume is highly concise, consisting of only two relatively short chapters: “Putin’s Last Crown Council” and “Ukraine and the Existential Embargo Imposed on Russia.” These two chapters survey the issues surrounding the war at the borders of the European Union and propose several thought-provoking avenues for reflection.

The volume is characterized by a fresh and engaging style, both accessible and enjoyable to read. The inventive use of Hotpot AI software, together with the courageous use of concepts drawn from the social sciences and international relations, gives the work both fluency and intellectual dynamism. Although certain ideas might at times have benefited from further clarification or a more developed line of argumentation, the diversity of authors referenced, the structure of the text, and the clarity of the language all contribute to making this volume a valuable contribution, one that specialists in the field should regard as essential reading—political science students, diplomats, and any reader eager to understand why the world’s military giants can often stumble in the web of normative and economic “strings” woven by small states.

The text also constitutes an invitation to reflection, while at the same time serving as a guide to the restructuring of the international system. The future is not merely uncertain; it is being reshaped before our very eyes, depending on decisions and circumstances. Both the Lilliputians and the Gullivers have a role to play. Our analyses seek to anticipate this future and render it more intelligible. Yet the contemporary world is characterized by a high degree of volatility. In the author’s words: “It remains to be seen whether the persistence of nuclear arsenals and economic interdependence will be sufficient to avoid the Thucydides Trap. A world in which the Lilliputians numerically

outnumber the Gullivers may prove to be a more stable one, perhaps even one in which conflict remains marginal. At the same time, however, separatist tendencies, exacerbated nationalism coupled with populism, and the decline of interdependence raise serious concerns” (23-24).

The distinctive value of the volume lies in its ability to operationalize Jonathan Swift’s classic literary metaphor into a rigorous, three-party structural framework for contemporary geopolitics. Instead of portraying small states as mere victims of great power rivalry, the volume argues convincingly that, within the contemporary international system, networks of smaller states possess the capacity to restrain, contain, and even paralyze an aggressive global power. Through smart strategies Lilliputians can influence the global agenda².

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