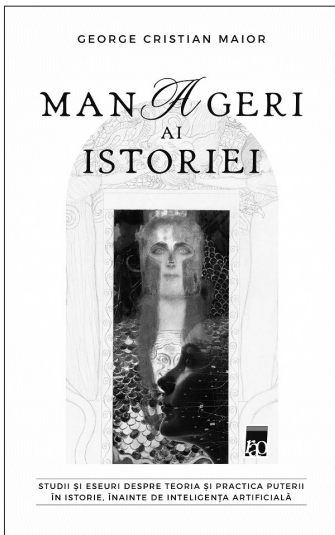

EDITORIAL EVENTS

History as a Space of Responsibility

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GEORGE CRISTIAN MAIOR, *Manageri ai istoriei: Studii și eseuri despre teoria și practica puterii în istorie: Înainte de inteligența artificială*
Bucharest: RAO, 2025.

ALTHOUGH POWER is omnipresent in all aspects of life, it remains a deeply contested concept with multiple, sometimes elusive, meanings. The interpretations and criteria of its application will always generate debate. Despite the ubiquity of the concept—with a history of reflection stretching back to antiquity—it is unsurprising that there is still no consensus on the definition of power, or on its nature, exercise and limits. Robert Gilpin, one of the most influential theorists in the field of international relations, describes the concept of power as “one of the most problematic in the field” and acknowledges that “the number and variety of definitions should be a source of embarrassment for political scientists.”²¹

David A. Baldwin, a professor at Princeton University, observed: “Although it may sometimes seem paradoxical, studying power is inevitable.”²² Power is difficult to capture in a stable

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definition and is constantly contested. It remains a concept that cannot be avoided, which is one of the fundamental tensions of modern political thought: the difficulty of conceptualizing power, yet the impossibility of ignoring it. This is because power reappears obsessively at pivotal moments in history, when political decisions and actions become crucial. It is precisely at these critical junctures that the need for a new type of strategic thinking becomes increasingly urgent—one that can provide relevant analytical tools for understanding power.

As a natural continuation of his interest in the emergence of this “new type of strategic thinking,” George Cristian Maior revisits the subject in 2025 by publishing the volume *Manageri ai istoriei: Studii și eseuri despre teoria și practica puterii în istorie, înainte de inteligența artificială* (Managers of history: Studies and essays on the theory and practice of power in history before artificial intelligence). As the author acknowledges, this new volume brings together studies and essays that formed a significant part of the empirical basis for his broader, more theoretical work, *Superpolitik—Superpolitica: Triumf și eșec strategic: Conducători, mari ambiții de putere și logica legitimității în ordinea statelor și relațiile internaționale* (Superpolitik—Superpolitics: Strategic triumph and failure: Leaders, grand ambitions of power and the logic of legitimacy in the order of states and international relations (Bucharest: RAO, 2024).

In *Superpolitik*, George Cristian Maior constructed a coherent theoretical framework for understanding state leadership within the Superpolitics³ paradigm, presenting it as an ideal type (in the Weberian sense) of political decision-making based on rational and comprehensive models. In contrast, *Manageri ai istoriei* delves into the realm of the empirical material and the preliminary reflections that informed the theoretical framework of the 2024 publication. This volume explores the nature, exercise and limits of power in various historical contexts, examining it not only as an abstract phenomenon, but also as a driving force of history that balances authority and legitimacy with decision-making and responsibility.

A few remarks about the study of power are necessary from the outset. Due to its deeply interdependent nature, analyzing power in international relations is a complex task requiring a multidimensional approach. The study of power involves oscillating among three distinct fields of inquiry, each with its own methods, objectives and fundamental concepts: (1) political theory, which focuses on the normative aspects of power, i.e., how power should be exercised; (2) explanatory theories, which use scientific methods to study how power manifests and is distributed in reality; and (3) the praxeological approach, which centers on the empirical analysis of real processes in international relations. Within the latter approach, power is exercised through international politics, and the analysis of power is grounded in historical experience.

Therefore, analyzing power in international relations requires a combination of political theory, empirical research and political practice. While political theory helps us to understand the normative dimensions of power, explanatory theories provide tools with which to study the behaviors and mechanisms underlying power relations. The praxeological approach, meanwhile, offers valuable lessons drawn from historical experience. All of these perspectives are essential for understanding how power manifests itself in the real world of international relations.

It is within this interpretative framework that the volume *Manageri ai istoriei* is situated. In it, George Cristian Maior proposes an integrative approach to power, moving naturally between the three fields of enquiry and elegantly combining the rigor of historical analysis with the subtlety of theoretical reflection.

From antiquity to the modern era, this compelling reading of history brings together theorists such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Carl von Clausewitz, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Edward Luttwak, alongside major practitioners of power—from Marcus Tullius Cicero and Cardinal Richelieu, to Otto von Bismarck, Winston Churchill, Woodrow Wilson, and Henry Kissinger.

The analysis is not confined to presenting the ideas or biographies of these “managers of history,” but is integrated into a broader theoretical framework. Rather than merely proposing a history of political ideas or a typology of leaders, the book investigates the conditions under which human power has functioned, been legitimized, and been assumed over time.

By engaging with Maior’s historical exploration of power, we discover “a Cicero just as realistic as Machiavelli.” Stereotypes dissolve and the difference in vision between Cicero and Machiavelli becomes increasingly blurred. The reader comes to understand that the history of power is not about mythologized figures, but rather about real people, and that “the art of statecraft is not about the ideal, but only about what is achievable.” While Cicero is credited with initiating the transition towards modern political thought, Machiavelli is regarded as having carried out a genuine “intellectual revolution,” not so much by emancipating politics from religion, but primarily by viewing politics as the practical domain of managing the internal and external affairs of the state according to its own rules. However, Machiavelli’s most valuable legacy may be the lesson that the world is not an ideal place, nor will it ever be, and politics must be a useful instrument for governing effectively in relation to reality, not to concepts and utopian ideals.

Maior concludes that from Cardinal Richelieu we have inherited “the fundamental shift from the political man to the statesman,” a transformation marking the transition from strategic vision (a good politician’s quality) to strategic construction (a statesman’s extraordinary quality). According to Maior, Richelieu

was the master of strategic practice, developing a “cool and precise assessment of the state’s medium- and long-term interests” and a “practical recipe for the necessary tactics and steps to promote and achieve those interests.”

Otto von Bismarck, the chancellor and architect of German unification, was a “true statesman.” By promoting a policy grounded in political realism (*Realpolitik*), a lucid assessment of the balance of power, and the calculated use of diplomatic and military instruments, today he can still offer a lesson in the art and science of governance and strategic leadership.

While Machiavelli, Richelieu, and Bismarck demonstrated what the concept of superpolitics means in the flow of history, with all its lights and shadows, Woodrow Wilson, through his political legacy, is the one who defines “the qualitative difference between the politician and the statesman,” according to George Maior. Wilson is undoubtedly a “superpolitician” whose political actions embody all the qualities and attributes of superpolitics.

Just as he dispelled misconceptions about Cicero and Machiavelli, Maior demonstrates that the great classical theories of war must also be interpreted in light of the present day. In the case of Carl von Clausewitz, widely regarded as the father of modern strategic thought, Maior nevertheless points out that, while the maxim “war is the continuation of politics by other means” remains a cornerstone, classical theses risk becoming insufficient in the face of rapid technological revolutions and the current dynamics of power. Clausewitz was a theorist of war, not of power. Maior does not deny the relevance of Clausewitz’s theory of “the rationalization of war”; on the contrary, he acknowledges its importance in understanding conflicts. However, he also demonstrates that traditional principles must be viewed in the context of the present day and adapted to new realities.

“How, then, are we to understand politics and power relations in this new reality, where the traditional vices of political power and international disorder intertwine with new models of social and material evolution?” Maior asks pointedly. Looking to the future, the author considers the current challenges of exercising power and asks a provocative question: how will artificial intelligence transform the exercise of power, the nature of politics, and the formulation of strategies?

Maior continues to explore the theme of uncertainty, which he introduced more than ten years ago⁴ as an innovative epistemological principle to enable the empirical investigation of the exercise of power under the vast conceptual and philosophical umbrella of postmodernity and postmodernism.

In the face of these new technological realities, which bring with them an increasing level of uncertainty, the way we think strategically must evolve. The phrase “before artificial intelligence” is not intended to express nostalgia, but rather to sound a warning. The book anticipates the reconfiguration of power in

the face of the rise of artificial intelligence, marking a threshold beyond which the fundamental act of exercising power—decision-making—risks being externalized without truly being delegated.

Rather than being merely an analysis of the past, *Manageri ai istoriei* becomes a meditation on the limits and conditions of exercising power in an era in which the autonomy of human decision-making is being called into question. In this sense, the book also serves as a subtle yet firm warning about the danger of equating decisional efficiency with the abdication of political judgement. Maior draws attention to the risk that humanity may be heading towards a ‘single manager of history’ in the form of artificial intelligence.

“Power must be understood, accepted, and evaluated,” Maior insists. Yet, artificial intelligence affects precisely this relationship: the relationship between power and responsibility; authority and legitimacy; and decision and accountability. Power that relinquishes human judgement, discernment and responsibility is no longer political; it becomes merely a technological instrument. Power thus risks becoming abstract and detached from responsibility, as well as the moral judgement that has, over time, come to define the statesman.

Maior’s mastery lies precisely in this: a historical analysis grounded in an objective perspective on the ‘managers of history,’ capturing both the luminous and the darker sides of those who succeeded in winning the most important battle—the one with history—interwoven with theoretical reflections that culminate in a discreet yet urgent call for vigilance. “It is time to learn something, at least a little, from these experiences, and to read about these people. Only in this way will we come to realize our own limits.” Anyone venturing into the arena of politics, or seeking to understand it and strategic thinking, needs these lessons. Only by developing a nuanced understanding of these great figures can we pave the way for a clearer and more responsible vision of the political present and future.

Thus, in his book, George Maior interrogates the past to understand the present and warns of the risk of the future being governed not by judgement, political wisdom and responsibility, but by the impersonal logic of algorithms. The book is therefore not merely an incursion into the past; it is also a guide to understanding the present, offering a subtle warning about how political decisions may be shaped—or distorted—by the profound transformations of the contemporary world. History is viewed not as a succession of historical figures, but as a space of responsibility at a time when the emergence of artificial intelligence risks turning power into a mere algorithmic process. In an age in which artificial intelligence is becoming embedded in strategic calculations and political decision-making, Maior’s warning is crucial: “Artificial intelligence does not at all mean wisdom. Wisdom is a definitive attribute of human beings.”



Notes

1. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
2. David A. Baldwin, *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).
3. Maior introduced the concept of Superpolitik into the domestic strategic vocabulary in 2024. Essentially, superpolitik represents “a distinct exercise in the application of power,” a strategy that goes beyond the standard political mechanisms and emerges in extraordinary situations. The conceptual distinction between politics and superpolitics lies in the context in which the latter is expressed: “Superpolitics always emerges and expresses itself within an exceptional context, generally (though not necessarily!) involving a crisis in the natural order of the state or the international order of states. This has inevitable consequences at both levels: a rupture in politico-historical evolution; a radical transformation; or a return to previous models” (George Cristian Maior, *Superpolitik—Superpolitica: Triumf și eșec strategic: Conducători, mari ambiții de putere și logica legitimității în ordinea statelor și relațiile internaționale*, Bucharest: RAO, 2024, 8). Therefore, the criterion that distinguishes politics from superpolitics is not related to instruments or intentions, but rather to the exceptional nature of the context in which the decision is made and the inevitable consequences it generates, whether domestically or internationally.
4. George Cristian Maior, *Incertitudine: Gândire strategică și relații internaționale în secolul XXI* (Bucharest: RAO, 2014).