



AFIO Exclusive Book Review (April 2024)

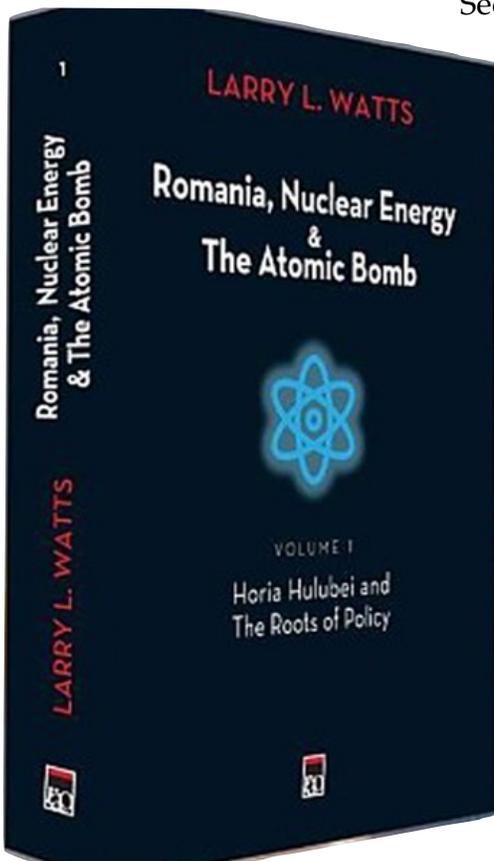
Romania, Nuclear Energy, and The Atomic Bomb: Horia Hulubei and the Roots of Policy

by Larry L. Watts
(Rao Books, 2023)

Review by AFIO Member **Dr. Derrin R. Smith***

Throughout this scholarly text on the evolution of nuclear weapons and politectonics of nuclear power, intelligence operations and direct impacts of intelligence on U.S. and global nuclear development--and anti-proliferation policies--loom large, even while threaded artfully throughout the text and keenly detailed footnotes. Dr. Watts recently taught classes on intelligence, security, and the Cold War in the Masters Program on

Security Studies at the University of Bucharest, although his deep expertise in Eastern European research and analyses dates from the 1980s. Upon reviewing his latest book, it is understandable that he, an American citizen, was elected an honorary member of the Romanian Academy of Scientists in 2013.



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From the perspective of intelligence studies on the advances of nuclear technology from pre-WWII through the 1960s, this latest study is a must-read for serious intelligence scholars. Relevance to today's geopolitics—as today's Kremlin mirrors Krushchev's obsession with supranational authority over neighboring states—and current disinformation campaigns by Putin's malign actors globally, will give the thoughtful reader pause. Even the suspected assassination of Prague's foreign minister Jan Masaryk in 1948, "helped" out of a 3rd story window, seems to correlate with multiple weak-window incidents among those falling out of favor with Putin's dictatorial, czarist regime. Indeed, studious readers will be struck by the extent to which today's Kremlin is borrowing verbatim from the worst of the Soviet playbook under Stalin, Krushchev, and other Soviet leaders.

The precisely detailed footnotes demand close attention, essentially a second academic volume on their own, as paramilitary operations such as **QKBROIL** (Bucharest) and Operation Valuable-**BGFIEND** (Albania), plus anti-communist psyops such as **MOCKINGBIRD** (Paris) provide important context, worthy of deep reflection in today's troubled times. (It is worthy of note that the head of the U.S. legation in Bucharest, Robert Thayer, was CIA's Chief of Station in Paris and ran **MOCKINGBIRD**.)

Dr. Watts also convincingly identifies documented flaws in reports by 1978 secret police defector Ion Pacepa—reports unwittingly amplified by other academics—that indicate evidence of disinformation infused in his allegations that could have constituted a campaign to create stresses in the budding U.S.-Romania relationship over some decades. It is worthy of note that just as Krushchev repeatedly asserted that the Soviet Union would be victorious in any nuclear war, today we hear Putin and his Kremlin cronies echoing dangerous threats of nuclear confrontation and insistence regarding their willingness to fight a nuclear war.

While this volume includes deep-dive research that focuses on the remarkable life, times, and struggles of Dr. Horia Hulubei, who headed Romanian nuclear research from 1948 until 1970, and Romania's chief scientific delegate to the fledgling IAEA, much more is brought to light. For example, concerted efforts by Moscow to implicate Romania as an actor and proponent in the Cuban Missile Crisis (23 October 1962); or powerful evidence that Romania's nuclear nonproliferation position was very much in accord with DCI McCone's. (It is worthy of note that DCI McCone previously served as head of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (1958-1961).)

In summary, serious intelligence and academic professionals with an aversion to the destruction of humanity through nuclear weapons need to not just read this book; they should consume it.

***Dr. Derrin R. Smith**, an AFIO life member since 1986, works on special projects at the Office of Regional Peace and Security, Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State. His IC career included time as a Marines military intelligence specialist (tactical HUMINT and strategic intelligence), an imagery interpretation specialist at the Air Force Air Intelligence Training Command, and Remote Sensor Employment for Reconnaissance and STA Personnel. The opinions expressed in this review are Dr. Smith's and do not represent the policies or positions of any U.S. government agency or AFIO.