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The Role of Political Competition and Bargaining in Russian Foreign Policy:

The Case of Russian Policy Toward Moldova

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Recent discussions about Russian foreign policy have generally concentrated on its shift to the right. Along with numerous Western observers, who interpret Russian international behavior as a single-player activity, the Russian foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev has himself attempted to portray his policy in terms of realist theory. Answering numerous accusations on “embracing some policies that [he] once spoke out against” (Rafael *et al.*, 1994), Kozyrev paints an explicit picture of a strategic response by his ministry to objective world conditions. However, analysis shows that world conditions played a very small role in shaping Russian foreign policy. Elsevier Science Ltd. Copyright © 1996 The Regents of the University of California

The dynamics of Russian–Moldovan relations seems to present an eloquent example of the “non-international” sources of the recent shift in Russian foreign policy. This particular case, although less known than the Ukraine or the Baltics, contains some of the major “objective” problems faced by the Russian foreign ministry in the New Independent States (NIS), such as a large Russian-speaking population, compactly concentrated and violently opposed to the “breaking of historical ties with Russia;” the high degree of Moldovan economic dependency; and Russian military involvement. This case also presents a classic example of the “realist” interpretations of Russian foreign policy by both Russian and Western observers.

A careful examination of the recent shift in Russian policy toward Moldova shows that the dynamics of this shift does not correspond to changes in the behavior of the Moldovan state. Moreover, there is an obvious time conflict between the escalation of objective threats to Russian interests in Moldova (such as the possibility of Moldova’s union with Romania and human rights violations) and Russia’s response to them: Russian policy became more hostile at exactly the time when the threats were eliminated by the Moldovan side.

The absence of a chronological connection between the foreign threat and the Russian reaction to it suggests that there were other, non-international, forces that overruled the impact of the objective circumstances. The aim of this paper is to examine Russian policy toward Moldova in terms of competitive politics theory,

a theory that offers an alternative explanation to the recent shift in Russian foreign policy.¹ The first section presents a brief overview of competitive politics theory, focusing on foreign policy making. The second section discusses the failure of the application of the realist theory to Russian–Moldovan relations, while the third section offers empirical evidence of the impact of bargaining on Russian policy toward Moldova.

Competitive Politics Theory and its Application to the Russian Policy Toward Moldova

The following analysis of Russian policy toward Moldova will attempt to answer two major questions. First, what were the mechanisms that defined the recent shift in Russian foreign policy? Second, was this policy adaptive to the world conditions and, if not, what were the reasons for this?

As mentioned above, the absence of a chronological connection between the Moldovan threat to Russian interests and the Russian response to this threat might suggest that Russian policy toward Moldova was not defined by international circumstances and was poorly responsive to the concessions offered by the Moldovan government. Competitive politics theory provides an explanation for both phenomena by defining the links between domestic politics and foreign policy.

This theory describes foreign policy as a product of the competition for office by leaders. Politicians win and hold their offices by going public and bargaining: going public is intended to recruit constituents and secure office, and bargaining is meant to resolve disagreement between winning candidates. “By offering material benefits and by symbolic personification of voters, a politician induces constituents to recommit their allegiance to the polity” (Anderson, 1993, p.64). In order to win the support of constituents, politicians are forced to distinguish themselves from other competitors by offering distinctive visions of the domestic social order accompanied by international grand strategies.

The maladaptation of foreign policy to the world conditions is explained by the following distinct features of competitive politics:

1. the logrolling that lowers the effectiveness of all initial policies and produces compromise variants which cannot work due to the intentionally contrasting goals of the original policies;
2. the separation of issues that makes negotiations among winning sides easier, but which loses the complex interdependence of the combined parts by treating them as irrelevant to each other;
3. the symbolism of grand strategies that serves the purpose of constituency building and replaces the search for an optimal response to the international circumstances.

The adaptation of foreign policy to world events to a large extent depends on whether a particular event was included in a competitor’s grand strategy. Where the world event was not a part of a grand strategy, a more optimal response is to be expected. Since grand strategies, as an extension of domestic order visions, have domestic origins, foreign policy, as a product of their combination, has domestic origins as well.

1. For a detailed description of competitive politics theory, see Anderson (1993).

Russian policy toward Moldova in 1991–1995 was driven by an accelerated differentiation among leaders and logrolling of their grand strategies. The monolith character of the Atlanticist views of the early Russian government can be explained by the symbolic differentiation of the new Russian leaders from the old Soviet *nomenklatura* in their domestic visions (economic reform and privatization, liberalization, fight “against privileges,” national emancipation, and so on) that were accompanied by a new pro-Western grand strategy in foreign policy.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, the unity of domestic vision and grand theory began to act against the winners. In order to win constituents in a new environment, Russian leaders faced the necessity of re-establishing their uniqueness by a symbolic differentiation from their former colleagues. As a result, Boris Yeltsin reinforced his Atlanticist views and supported Moldovan independence, while Alexander Rutskoi, who became the protector of the Russian population and the Russian military in the CIS, raised the issues of human rights and the future of Russian military personnel in Moldova. The Chairman of the Russian parliament, Ruslan Khazbulatov, chose to “specialize” in Central Asia and Muslim regions of the Russian Federation, and thus avoided discussions about Russian policy toward Moldova.

By going public, Russian leaders made sure that the population was familiar with their grand strategies and did not view them as a unified faceless force. Since the level of support for the Atlanticist domestic vision was proportional to the educational level of the population (see *Table 1*), the grand theory of the Atlanticist leaders appealed to the same category of voters (*Table 2*). Although the first results from Russian policy in Moldova were self-defeating, the Atlanticists attempted to ignore this fact in order to preserve the continuity of their grand strategy and to demonstrate their fidelity to the principles of democracy and modernization.

When the economic reforms lost mass popularity, and the failing Atlanticist domestic vision could not be saved by the grand strategy in foreign policy, the Atlanticists adjusted both their domestic order vision and the grand strategy. By doing so, they affected the existing symbolic differentiation between political competitors, forcing their opponents to move further to the right in order to preserve their distinctiveness in the political spectrum.

Table 1. Politico-economic Orientations in European Russia (N = 1437) (Zimmerman, 1994)

Orientation	Elite		University attendees		General public	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Market democrats	130	65	65	38	179	17
Market authoritarians	30	15	27	15	110	10
Social democrats	19	10	38	23	276	26
Socialist authoritarians	18	9	32	19	304	28
Undecided	3	2	7	4	199	19
Total	200	101	169	100	1068	100
1437 = 100		14		12		74

Market democrats are defined by Zimmerman (1994) as those who support the combination of democracy in polity and market in economy; market authoritarians are those who support dictatorship in polity and market in economy; social democrats are those who support democracy in polity and plan in economy; socialist authoritarians are those who support dictatorship in polity and plan in economy.

Table 2. Foreign policy orientations by grouping (N = 1437) (Zimmerman, 1994)

Issue-orientation	Elite		University attendees		General public	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agreed that Russia should "send military aid if asked to aid the country of the former Soviet Union"	106	56	57	37	328	34
-"-to other countries	65	35	31	21	170	18
Regards the "defense of Russians abroad in the former USSR" as a very important foreign policy goal	137	69	122	74	820	81
-"-in other countries	76	38	76	46	563	56
Agreed that "for the most part the national interests of Russia extends beyond its current territory"	149	77	92	58	501	57
Agreed that "military spendings should be decreased	119	62	74	47	365	38
Agreed that "aid to foreign countries should be decreased"	166	87	140	86	708	71
Disagreed that "we can solve our economic problems without the aid of the West"	105	57	66	42	258	28
Support global interdependence	100	56	60	45	231	31
Disagreed that "the US is a threat to Russia"	141	73	125	78	656	72

The Rhetoric of "Strategic Response" in the Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy

It is clear that the Russian foreign ministry prefers to interpret its activity as a rational response to the international situation. Explaining his recent shift to the right, Kozyrev blamed the objective circumstances that lay outside of the Russian government: "After the Soviet Union ended...and those countries [NIS] started to pass laws...that are really discriminatory...we started to speak out" (Socor, 1994a).

It is significant that the Russian foreign minister insisted on "being forced" to change his policy by the actions of "other countries," and not by the necessity of bargaining with his own domestic opposition. However, there are compelling reasons to believe that the real purpose of this "strategic reference" was not to share Kozyrev's analysis of the hidden processes affecting his ministry, but to portray Russian foreign policy to the West as rational, predictable, and logically explanatory.²

According to the "realist" analysts (both Western and Russian), the consistency of Russian activities in Moldova is based on the neo-imperialistic "Kozyrev

2. This interview was given to the Western analysts and published in the *RFE/RL Research Report* which is not available to the broad Russian public. Thus, it cannot be considered an example of Kozyrev's "going public" for support among his domestic constituencies, but rather a part of his Western-oriented campaign for maintaining the "democratic" face of Russian foreign policy makers.

doctrine.”³ While insisting on a differentiation between his policy and the Brezhnev doctrine, Kozyrev does not deny the “special role” of Russia in the area of the former Soviet Union “owing to the special circumstances and because of the special weight of Russia” (Rafael *et al.*, 1994).

Similar views are held by non-governmental foreign policy makers who still have a significant impact on Russian foreign policy, despite the fact that their role in the legislature has been reduced by the changes in the constitution (Adams, 1994). Some principles of the “Kozyrev doctrine” have been formulated by Konstantin Zatulin, Chairman of the Duma’s Committee for CIS affairs and one of Kozyrev’s opponents: Russia’s “special role” in the CIS presupposes its “special right” to intervene in the domestic affairs of NIS at Moscow’s own discretion. Not only should the rights of the Russian-speaking population in NIS be protected by the Russian government, but “where ethnic minorities reside compactly, they must be granted autonomy and the state must become federative. The special status of regions inhabited by ethnic minorities must be backed by Moscow guarantees” (Socor, 1994a).

This thesis about Moscow’s guarantees for *any* ethnic minority in the NIS looks like “very new thinking” compared to the previous declarations about the “protection of the Russian population.” Now, Russian officials claim that they do not distinguish Russian or even Russian-speaking minorities from non-Russian ones. This can be translated as an increasing possibility of involvement by Russia in any conflict in the territory of an NIS even if Russian interests are not affected directly, such as the Uzbek–Kazakh conflict in Kazakhstan, the Abkhaz–Georgian conflict in Georgia, the Gagaus–Moldovan conflict in Southern Moldova, etc. Although in his Western interview Kozyrev insisted that Russia “is not looking to establish and maintain dominance” in NIS (Rafael *et al.*, 1994), one can list numerous cases of Russian pressure on former Soviet republics aimed at influencing their domestic policies.⁴ According to Zatulin, by early 1994 the “Kozyrev doctrine” was actively supported by both the Duma and Russia’s foreign ministry: “Foreign Ministry has sharply changed its position, and our official positions are practically the same” (Socor, 1994a).

According to the “realists,” the tactics of Russian support for local separatists in the territories of the former USSR was successfully tested in Abkhazia and can be expected in other regions. The tactic consists of fragmentation of the new states, destabilization of their governments, an escalation in their military and political dependence on Russia, and the taking of the NIS under Russian control. Logically, the “realists” interpret the struggle around the Dniester as a continuation of the Russian “special treatment” which showed its efficiency in Abkhazia:⁵ “Moldovan leaders see the Abkhazia and Transdniester scenarios as essentially analogous in their conception” (Socor, 1993a).

Applying the hypothetical “Kozyrev doctrine” to Moldova, the leader of the Russian “realists,” Andranik Migranyan, asserts that: “Russian support for the Dniester Republic has to a large extent been a factor complicating the process of the unification of Moldova and Romania, whereby Moldova would be deprived

3. This term is opposed by Kozyrev in favor of the “Yeltsin doctrine”—because the president is Yeltsin. See Rafael *et al.* (1994).

4. See, for example, the attempts to link the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltics and Moldova with “resolution of the problem of the Russian population.”

5. Parallels between Abkhazia, the Dniester Republic, and Crimea became even more popular after the Dniester Republic signed a mutual military aid treaty with Abkhazia and an economic cooperation agreement with Crimea (Rotar, 1994).

forever of the Dniester region” (Migranyan, 1994). Migranyan’s statement provides a “realist” picture of events that is believed to define Russian foreign policy toward Moldova. It is clearly a set of moves initiated by a single rational player, where:

1. the unification of Moldova and Romania threatens Russian interests, and
2. this unification becomes a reality in the immediate future, and
3. the resistance of the Dniester Republic (DR) is the only real obstacle in the way of unification; therefore
4. Russia supports DR, therefore
5. Moldova cannot unify with Romania under the pressure of DR conflict, therefore
6. unification is cancelled, therefore
7. Russian interests are protected.

There are three points in Migranyan’s statement that seem very arguable. First of all, by the time Russia initiated its military and political support for the Dniester Republic, the unification with Romania had been rejected by the majority of the Moldovan population. There are different opinions about the date that can be counted as the “beginning of Russian support for [a] Dniester Republic,” but the majority of analysts agree that it could not be earlier than February, 1992. However, the presidential elections, that demonstrated the total (about 98 per cent of votes) support for Mircea Snegur (read, for independence both from Russia and Romania), were held on December 8, 1991. These elections, along with numerous polls, prove that the process of unification of Moldova with Romania was “complicated” at least two months before any kind of “Russian support for the Dniester republic” began to threaten it.

The *potential* character of the Russian threat helps to support Migranyan’s statement at this stage, but there is hardly any evidence of even a potential Russian threat to Moldovan independence before the spring of 1992. Although Kozyrev insists that the “strong language on Russian-speaking minorities” can be found in his inauguration speech in early 1991, he admits that the open articulation of his position toward the discriminatory laws of NIS cannot be dated earlier than by the second quarter of 1992 (Rafael *et al.*, 1994). It is very unlikely that the majority of the Moldovan population could fathom the “true concerns” of the Russian government before the foreign minister went public with his position.

Second, there were quite a few reasons why the unionist idea was *never* popular among the majority of the Moldovan population, and—what is important—the factor of a Russian threat in any form was *never* the most compelling one. The real reasons for the popular attitude of anti-unionism were not connected with possible Russian pressure, but were:

- (a) a fear by local elites of Romanian hegemony in government, business, education, culture, etc. This fear was greatly strengthened by declarations by Romanian leaders about the “non-existence of a Moldovan nation” and by their rejection of any talks about possible Moldovan autonomy within Romania;
- (b) a fear of simply being absorbed or occupied by the new “big brother” with no prospect of cancelling the unification agreement in the future if the new relationship did not satisfy the Moldovan side. This fear was based on declarations by Romanian leaders about the necessity of participation by the

- whole Romanian nation (i.e. Romanians and Moldovans) in the referendum determining the future status of Moldova;⁶
- (c) a fear of economic exploitation by the more industrialized regions of Romania; Moldovans could not compete with Romanians who started market reforms earlier;
 - (d) a fear of becoming “second class citizens” in various property questions, including possible claims by former Romanian landowners for land nationalized by the Soviets;
 - (e) the low level of economic attractiveness of Romania, compared to the case of the reunification of Germany. Mass migration from Romania to Western Europe was eloquent enough to make Moldovans skeptical about the “economic miracle” of the Romanian reforms advertised by the Moldovan Popular Front (MPF). According to Michael Shafir, “in Germany by late 1993 every fourth asylum seeker had arrived from Romania and the total number of Romanian citizens who had sought asylum in other countries between January 1990 and December 1993 was estimated...to be a quarter of a million” (Shafir, 1994);
 - (f) a belief that an independent Moldova would be more capable of building a strong civil society (a goal proclaimed by all Soviet, Russian, and Moldovan politicians during and after *perestroika*) than Romania with its turbulent and unpredictable political culture (execution of the Ceausescu family, etc.);
 - (g) a belief that the rights of minorities (not only Russian, but also Gagaus, Jewish, Ukrainian, etc.) could not be protected in Romania since even the right of a Moldovan majority to self-determination was denied by Romania’s denunciation of the existence of a Moldovan nation and its demand for participation of “all Romanians” in a referendum about the future of a Moldovan state;⁷
 - (h) the general conservatism of the Moldovan population, especially in the countryside, including its unwillingness to change its lifestyle.

The third argument against the “realist” belief about the consistency of Russian policy toward Moldova is based on the fact that the possibility of Moldova’s loss of the Dniester region *could not* prevent Moldova from unification with Romania (in the case of a mass support for this idea). Moreover, ironically, it would work *for* such a unification: Keeping the Dniester region in a united Romania would not be just difficult or dangerous, but also *undesirable* for the national idea. Being mostly Slavic, and geographically and historically alien to Romania, the Dniester region was not included in any maps of the “united Romanian state” issued by

6. Subsequently, the Romanian government proved that Moldovan fears of the interference of the new “big brother” in Moldova’s affairs had a basis: in a statement issued on August 1, 1994, Bucharest criticized the new Moldovan constitution for violating “historic and scientific truth...aiming to deny Moldova’s character as a Romanian state.” Denouncing the existence of the Moldovan nation, the Romanian government interpreted the new constitution as an attempt to continue Soviet national politics by “inventing a new [Moldovan] nation” (Socor, 1994b).

7. Later actions of the Romanian government confirmed this fear as well. In a statement issued on August 1, 1994, official Bucharest disagreed with the new Moldovan constitutional provisions on national–territorial autonomy as “encouraging separatism” and called on Moldova to guarantee “the rights of the majority of the population, the Moldovans and Romanians” instead (Socor, 1994b). As a result of the new ethnic politics endorsed by the Moldovan government, national minorities in Moldova enjoy one of the highest levels of political power in Eastern Europe, which cannot be said about the compactly residing minorities in Romania.

the Moldovan Popular Front.⁸ In its long-run programs, the MPF did not plan to include any of the territories on the left bank of the Dniester in a united Romania, but did raise, however, the question about “genuine Romanian territories”—the Bukovina and Ismail regions—“occupied” by the Ukraine.⁹

A quick, painless, and maybe accompanied by significant contributions “reunification” of the Dniester region with Ukraine would be the best solution for Moldova if the unionist idea had won popularity and the process of unification had started. The author insists that the leaders of the Dniester Republic were familiar with these views in the Summer of 1991 and did not expect a signification Moldovan resistance to the separation process. In his interview with the author, the “gray cardinal” of the Dniester Republic, Veleriy Litskai, mentioned the official proposition of Dniester–Ukrainian unification prepared by the Tiraspol’s government in August 1991 and delivered to Kiev by the president of DR Igor Smirnov in September 1991.¹⁰ According to Litskai, the unofficial talks on DR–Ukrainian unification were interrupted by the declaration of Ukrainian independence that put an end to any borders discussions.

Therefore, the reason for the unionists’ activity in the Dniester conflict was not an attempt to keep the region within a united Romania, as is portrayed by the “realist” observers. Mass unionists’ interference in the Dniester problem should rather be described in terms of what Esman (1994) calls the defensive ethnic mobilization: in order to overcome the “Romanophobia” that was believed to be the main reason for the rejection of pan-Romanian ideas by the Moldovan population, the leaders of the MPF attempted to unify the nation against the common enemy and to escalate nationalist feelings. The activities of the Dniester leaders offered a perfect base for Moldovan ethnic mobilization: the prohibition of the traditional Latin script on the left bank of the Dniester; the coexistence of two separate law enforcement systems (the Moldovan police and Dniester militia); the arrests of MPF activists, and others. For various reasons, however, these “gifts” were not taken advantage of by the MPF, and ethnic mobilization did not succeed.

Therefore, contrary to the popular myth, a separation of the Dniester region would not complicate the process of the unification of Moldova and Romania, a process already complicated for numerous reasons, of which the Russian threat was hardly the main one. Moreover, the “complications” took place a few months

8. Obviously, we are not talking about hyperbolized maps of a “Great Romanian Kingdom” that covered at least four European states, including Ukraine. They were mostly an innocent part of “national pride” programs, and contained no real political threat.

9. The maps of united Romania that included Bukovina and Ismail and did not include the Dniester region were shown on the front pages of each issue of the official MPF newspaper *Tara* during 1990–1992. The thesis about the undesirability of including the Dniester region in a united Romania was expressed by the former activist of MPF, presidential adviser Oasu Nantoi, in his interview with the author in February, 1992. (Parts of the interview were published in *Megapolis-Express* in February and March of 1992.) An identical view on the future of the Dniester region in the case of unification was expressed by the leader of the economic committee of MPF Sergiu Kirke in his interview with the author in January, 1994.

10. During his visit, Smirnov was mysteriously arrested in downtown Kiev by Moldovan security forces and delivered to the Chisinau jail. In terms of “rational” response of Moldovan state to the “objective circumstances”, this action seems meaningless since the possibility of Ukrainian collaboration with the recent supporters of Yanaev’s coup was practically ruled out, especially in such a delicate issue as borders, and especially after Rutskoi’s comments about the future of Ukrainian–Russian borders. However, in terms of defensive ethnic mobilization, this action can be seen as a demonstrative attempt by the remains of unionists in Moldovan government to accelerate nationalist hysteria and strengthen their positions that were lost after the resignation of Prime Minister Mircea Druk.

before any Russian threat appeared at all, and thus the whole logic of the interpretation of Russian policy toward Moldova as a “strategic response to the unification” seems questionable.

In their attempts to equate the Abkhazian and Dniester scenarios, the “realist” critics disregard the principal difference between these regions from a national perspective: Abkhazia was always seen by Tbilisi as a genuine, historical, and, in some respects, crucially important part of the Georgian state, which could not be sacrificed even for the independence of the rest of Georgia; the loss of the Dniester region, on the other hand, would not and could not play such an essential role in Romanian nation-building, even if the very idea of a united Romania had been supported by the masses. Moreover, as an alien Slavic land and a potential center of instability, the Dniester region was not welcome in a united Romania. This difference between the role of Abkhazia in independent Georgia and the role of the Dniester region in a united Romania makes the simple analogy between these cases inaccurate.

Many observers have emphasized the economic importance of the Dniester region, an importance that supposedly has attracted the unionists. However, being the most developed region in Moldova, the Dniester area can play an important role in an *independent* Moldovan Republic; as part of the Romanian economy, it was bound to lose its relative weight. Moreover, the region is closely tied with the Ukrainian economy, and its re-orientation towards Romania might be problematic and unexpectedly costly. In economic terms, the Dniester region is much more important to the proponents of an independent Moldova than to the unionists.

Accepting the “imperialist” explanation of Russian policy toward Moldova, it is clear that this policy, while it has been successful in Georgia, in the case of Moldova has turned out to be illogical and inconsistent, and, in its attempt to prevent unification, could be described as knocking at an open door. However, even if the “door” had been “closed” (i.e. unification feelings throughout the country were strong), a Russian policy based on supporting the separatists would probably have accelerated the unification process: “self-determination” of the Dniester region under Russian control would solve one of the most difficult problems of unification—the problem of a separatist minority that is compactly concentrated and supported from abroad. In addition, it would have rallied the population for the sake of defensive ethnic mobilization which would inevitably have led to unification as the only possible protection against Russian expansionism.

The most visible element of this “planned imperialist invasion” was the activity of the 14th Army whose former commander, General Alexander Lebed, refused the orders of the Russian Defense Minister, General Pavel Grachev. Moreover, Lebed declared that he “never served the President (Yeltsin) and is not about to serve him”: he pledged to serve the Fatherland (Socor, 1993b).

Unlike the Russian troops in Abkhazia whose actions can be analysed in terms of a general plan by the central government, the 14th Army promoted its own policy; General Lebed assumed that military non-participation in politics was “a questionable formula” (Socor, 1993b). Moreover, not only did the 14th Army refuse to serve the Russian President—it also did not serve the Dniester government. In his public statements in Tiraspol in October 11, 12, and 13 of 1993, Lebed accused the Dniester republic’s Minister of State Security and Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of sending troops to support anti-governmental rebels in Moscow. The general called for the dismissal and prosecution of the two high public officials who organized and led the Dniester armed fighters in Moscow (Socor, 1993c). On numerous occasions, Lebed confronted the Dniester leaders with evidence of

corruption and of “having repaid Russia with black ingratitude” by sending fighters to Moscow in October, 1993 (Socor, 1994c).

The “realist” observers, who describe Russian policy toward NIS in terms of a single-player “Kozyrev doctrine”, have acted on the assumption that the army plays a crucial role in well-planned Moscow actions against Moldovan unification with Romania. The absence of control over the army makes this theory highly questionable. Not only did the Russian government *not act in time*, as the Russian effort to slow down the unification process started *after* the unification idea had already been rejected by the majority of the population, not only did it *not react adequately*, as the “self-determination” of the Dniester Republic would speed up rather than delay unification, but, what is particularly important, the Russian government *did not have the means* to promote its “imperialistic policy” because it did not control the 14th Army.

The Power Struggle in the Russian Government and the Resulting Changes in Russian Policy Toward Moldova

Analysing the dynamics of Russian policy toward Moldova during 1990–1995, we can distinguish four major periods, characterized neither by the escalation of the military conflict, nor by trends in the Moldovan unification process, but exclusively by the changes in the principal foreign policy elite groups in Russian government.

The first period, that can be called the “soviet” one, starts with the election of Boris Yeltsin as Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet—the point at which Russian policy can actually be distinguished from the Soviet one—and ends with the anti-Gorbachev coup. The second period is between the August coup and the spring of 1992, and is usually described as a period of “Atlanticist” or “Westernizer” domination. The third period, from late spring, 1992, included the cancellation of Yeltsin’s visit to Japan and the rejection of any further “selling out” of Russian or Russian-controlled territories. This period ended with the resignation of Gaidar’s government and the defeat of Atlanticist hegemony in foreign policy. The fourth period, from the resignation of Gaidar until today, has been characterized as Eurasianist: “Special treaties should codify the special relations of the near abroad countries with Russia...Policy toward CIS in Russia’s internal policy” (Socor, 1994a).

The Soviet Period in Russian Politics

This period lasted from May, 1990 (Yeltsin’s election as Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet) until August, 1991 (the anti-Gorbachev coup). During this time, Russia was still a part of the Soviet Union, and the Russian leadership was radical, Western-oriented, pro-market, and generally anti-center—everything that later on was defined as “Atlanticist.” Unlike other Russian officials engaged in the struggle with the center, Andrey Kozyrev found his department of Russian foreign policy in a state of “peaceful coexistence” with the pro-Western Union foreign ministry. The historical mission of the new Russian foreign policy was described by Kozyrev as a conversion of Russia “from a dangerous sick giant of Eurasia into a participant in the Western coprosperity zone” (Plyays, 1994).

In Chisinau, the leadership at that period was radically pro-Romanian: the prime minister, the “power” ministers, chairman of parliament, and all members of the parliamentary presidium were counted among the founders of the Moldova Popular Front (MPF). As a result of MPF hegemony, in 1990–1991 the Russian population

in Moldova suffered the strongest discriminatory pressure in the entire post-*perestroika* period. The MPF-controlled parliament voted for new language laws that required all state employees to be able to speak, read, and write in college-level Moldovan by the year 1994. The first draft of the citizenship laws rejected the right of the majority of the Russian-speaking population to become Moldovan citizens, including those who were born in Moldova. Numerous cases of discrimination in employment and college admissions were collected by the Moldovan branch of the human rights organization MEMORIAL during the summer of 1991; an analytical report about the human rights situation in Moldova was prepared for the parliament of the Russian Federation. On the Dniester question, Chisinau refused to make any alterations in the language law for the region where the majority of the population did not speak Moldovan. Moldova's prime minister, Mircea Druk, strongly and consistently opposed any talks on granting a national-cultural autonomy status to the Dniester region, legitimizing the self-proclaimed Dniester Republic in the eyes of Russian-speakers on both banks of the Dniester and forcing the initially liberal ethnic Russians into an oppositional camp.

This period was the only time when Moldovan-Romanian unification was discussed on a state level; the only time when Moldova's government rejected any negotiations with the Dniester republic; and the time when discrimination of the Russian population in language and citizenship questions was approved by the parliament. It was also the only time when a Russian policy aimed at preventing Moldova's unification with Romania would make sense in terms of a "strategic response." However, neither the prospect of losing Moldova's territory to the Russian influence, nor human rights violations stopped the Russian government from supporting the pro-Romanian leadership in Chisinau. Numerous delegations from the Russian parliament (all supporters of Yeltsin's government) found the situation with respect to human rights "satisfactory," expressing more concern with the rights of ethnic Moldovans in the Dniester region than with the legalized discrimination of Russians on both the right- and left-bank of the Moldova.

It is interesting that one of the best known committees that "did not find any facts of discrimination" was headed by Feodor Shelov-Kovediaev who was included by Alexey Arbatov in the list of the most radical Westernizers, that is the leaders whose principal interest was the "urgent integration of Russia into the West economically, politically and even militarily" rather than the relations with NIS (Arbatov, 1994). Being "quite indifferent" to the "near abroad," Shelov-Kovediaev's committee repudiated the facts presented by MEMORIAL in order to convince the Russian parliament to normalize relations with Moldova, so allowing the Atlanticists in the Russian foreign ministry to concentrate on the "far abroad" policy.

It seems obvious that radical political reforms in Russia, including decentralization and the getting rid of Gorbachev, were more important to the Atlanticists in the Russian government than the keeping of Moldova within the Soviet sphere of influence or protection of the rights of a Russian-speaking minority. As formulated by Kozyrev, the immediate concern of the Russian government in 1991 was "to save the independence and democracy movement in [New Independent] states against the Soviet crackdown" (Rafael *et al.*, 1994). Thus, any government supporting Yeltsin in his anti-center struggle and sharing his market orientation was called "democratic" and accepted as an ally; the "objective circumstances" such as the actual character of these governments as well as the Russian national security issue were disregarded.

The Atlanticist Period in Russian Foreign Policy

This period, from August, 1991 (anti-Gorbachev coup), to the spring of 1992, was characterized by a practically unchallenged Atlanticist domination in the Russian government, which brought to the Russian foreign policy “conspicuously pro-Western views, with heavy tilt toward economic determinism, universal democratic values and general neglect of competitive geopolitical and strategic facets of international politics” (Arbatov, 1994).

In Moldova, this period was marked by the shift of power from the MPF to the pro-independence circles. Although the unionist leader in government, Mircea Druk, was forced to resign as prime minister earlier in May, 1991, in general the unionists kept their control over the government and parliament until the December presidential elections when Mircea Snegur received more than 98 per cent of the votes.¹¹ Subsequently, the unionist idea (that had never won significant mass support even during the period of MPF domination) began rapidly to lose its popularity. To confirm his victory, President Snegur called for a referendum that would constitute “the conferral of democratic legitimacy on Moldova’s chosen status as an independent state and make that choice clear to the world” (Socor, 1993d).

The Russian population in Moldova during this period was mostly conservative, pro-centrist, and pro-communist. During the August coup, the Dniester leaders welcomed Yanaev’s Committee¹² while officials in Chisinau issued a few statements in support of Yeltsin and Gorbachev. In response to Chisinau’s support during the August coup and in accordance with the dominant Atlanticist views, the Russian leadership took the side of the “democratic” Moldovan government in its struggle against the pro-communist Dniester Republic. Admitting that the spread of centrifugal tendencies from Moldova into the Russian Federation would be a threat to the Russian reforms, the Russian government asserted that it did not support separatism “as a threatening precedent.” Signing the Kiev statement of the heads of states of members of the CIS on the situation in the left-bank region of Moldova, Russia agreed that it considered the inviolability of Moldovan borders “a corner-stone of its politics toward the Moldovan state, the most important factor of stability in the Commonwealth and the region” (Kiev Statement of the Heads of States Members CIS, 1992).

Russian intervention in the Dniester conflict as a “strategic response” aimed at protecting the Russian population in the event of military fighting would have made sense at that time. However, such an intervention did not take place since the pro-Western government in Moscow was not interested either in a dispersal of its energy to the “unimportant” regions, or in being associated with pro-communist forces throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union. According to the

11. Although this number looks suspicious to the spoiled Western analyst, it does not signify rigged elections. Snegur ran for presidency unopposed because neither the unionists nor the Russia-oriented Interfront could offer an alternative candidate whose popularity would be close to Snegur’s. Moldovan Interfront called for the boycott of the elections, aiming at the creation of a parliamentary, not presidential, republic; this led to mass non-participation in the elections by the Russian-speaking population. At the same time, many unionists refused to vote because they did not see a “true Romanian” candidate in the ballot. Thus, the body of the participating electorate was mostly made up of the rural Moldovan population, and the number of 98 per cent could refer to it.

12. Technically, the government of Smirnov did not issue any official declarations during the August, 1991, coup—neither pro-Yanaev, nor pro-Gorbachev. However, it endorsed numerous publications in favor of the junta in Tiraspol’s newspapers. Later it denounced any connection between the governmental position and the publications in the Dniester press, although the Dniester officials on numerous occasions vocally supported the coup. See *Trudovy Tiraspol*, August 20–21, 1991.

Atlanticist grand strategy, Russian interests laid rather in cooperation with the West than in maintaining ties with subsidized republics of the former USSR. Moreover, concentration on NIS was not welcomed by Atlanticists, as a dangerous policy leading to “the postponement, if not collapse, of the market reforms in Russia” (Center of International Studies, 1992). Therefore, the Atlanticist-dominated Russian foreign ministry considered the loss of Moldova strategically less important than the loss of Western support that could follow the hypothetical Russian invasion.

At this time, the Atlanticists enjoyed practically unlimited power in the Russian foreign ministry; there was no real need to consider the demands of centrists and nationalists in the process of foreign policy making. The bargaining that greatly influenced Russian foreign policy in later periods was absent due to the absence of bargaining sides others than the governmental one. At this point, a few significant statements were made by the competing leaders¹³ in their attempts to win a part of the electorate by offering alternative domestic visions and grand strategies. These statements could be interpreted as the first sign of an emerging shift in Russian foreign policy. However, the recruiting of constituents takes time, and during the first months of 1992 the broad population was not familiar enough with the newly emerged differences among leading politicians. As a result, the opposition was not able to participate in an equal bargaining with Atlanticists, and its demands were neglected.

In fact, this period offers an unprecedented chance to witness a “purely” Atlanticist example of foreign policy, formulated without regard to domestic opposition. The self-defeating results of this policy could be attributed to a misinterpretation of the world conditions by the Atlanticist grand strategy: overestimation of Western willingness to incorporate Russia into the world market, exaggerated expectations of Western economic help, and so on.

The Period of Right-Center Shift (Spring, 1992–Autumn, 1992)

Although the date of the collapse of the Soviet Union (December, 1991) falls in the previous period, the new balance of interests in Russian politics does not finally emerge until the spring of 1992. The disappearance of the common Soviet enemy led to the dispersion of the formerly unified anti-Gorbachev opposition into a wide political spectrum; Atlanticism lost its monopoly of being the ideology of renewal. Since the alternative visions on Russian reforms have been formulated, further neglect of the non-Atlanticist forces became impossible.

In June, 1992, Gaidar became acting prime minister; three conservatives were appointed as deputy prime ministers. Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi shifted to the opposition camp; his People’s Party of Free Russia became a founding member of the right-centrist Civic Union coalition. The appearance of a real opposition with alternative grand strategies inevitably led to logrolling in foreign policy. Forced to take into consideration the demands of centrists and nationalists, the Russian government declared the policy of protecting the Russian population outside of Russia.

In Chisinau, pro-Romanian radicals lost all key leadership positions, except for the chairmanship of parliament and three seats in the presidium held by the moderate unionists who recognized the need for a transitional period before unification. After the government of Andrei Sangheli was formed, the sources of

13. See, for example, Rutskoi’s remarks about the future of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea made in late August, 1991.

discrimination against the Russian population were drastically reduced. On the citizenship question, the "zero option" was accepted; language requirements for state employees were reduced and the deadline was extended. The Dniester region was offered national autonomy, and parliamentary deputies from the left bank of the Dniester were asked to join the coalition government. Unification with Romania was eliminated from all governmental programs.

Answering the growing pressure of the opposition, and in spite of the actual relaxation of tensions in Moldova, the Russian government raised the issue of discrimination against the Russian population on both the left and right banks of the Dniester. Supported by Russia, the Dniester separatists rejected the offer to join Sangheli's government of national consensus, and the deputies of the Moldovan parliament from the left bank of the Dniester continued their parliamentary boycott. In its unsuccessful attempt to reach a compromise with the Dniester leaders, the Moldovan government dismissed Defense Minister, Ion Kostash, and Security Minister, Analiliu Plugaru, initiating the period of unilateral concessions. Confronting the "irrational" support of the Russian government for the separatist region, officials in Chisinau hoped to win Russia's sympathies "by becoming even more accommodating, sometimes at the cost of narrowing their room for maneuver" (Socor, 1993a).

By the time the officials rejected the idea of unification with Romania, announced the full membership of Moldova in the CIS, recognized the special status of the Dniester region, and gave the significant guarantees to minorities, including the national quotas in government, Russian policy toward Moldova became more hostile than ever. The bilateral negotiations on the withdrawal of the 14th Army from Moldova have been blocked for almost a year, and following the popular mood advocating protection of Russian-speakers in NIS, the Russian government has insisted on linking the withdrawal agreement to the resolution of the Dniester conflict.

Since, by the end of this period, Russia had achieved all possible "international" goals in Moldova, and since there were absolutely no facts testifying to the hypothetical "pro-Romanian setback" in the case of a Russian withdrawal from the Dniester region, further Russian hostility, in Kozyrev's terms of a rational response to objective circumstances, seemed unclear and "illogical."

Paradoxically enough, at this point Kozyrev was joined in his "strategic response" rhetorics by the Moldovan government and pro-Romanian Western analysts. Bewildered by the "sudden" toughening of the Russian position, they assumed that somehow, a "military presence in Moldova serves its [Russian] interests" (Socor, 1993a). Refusing to admit the influence of domestic sources on the shift in Russian foreign policy, the "realists" preferred to articulate the "conspiracy" theory: for some unclear reasons, the Russian state as a single player conducted a hostile policy toward Moldova, aiming to obtain even more concessions from the government in Chisinau. However, since by the autumn of 1992 Chisinau had given up almost everything possible, there were no more military, political, or economical goals *in Moldova* that could be achieved by a Russian military presence. Therefore, the reasons for Russian hostility were to be found in Moscow, not in Chisinau.

By the end of this period, the Russian political leadership became more vulnerable to the rising "right" pressure, "stemming not only from the public and the Supreme Soviet, but also from within bureaucracy, military and security establishments, industrial groups and young private capital" (Arbatov, 1994). Facing the real political competition, Kozyrev's ministry had to take account of the weight of

the opposition in the shaping of foreign policy. Whatever the result of the bargaining between the old pro-Western staff and the new oppositional forces happened to be, by definition it could not be a continuation of the previous Atlanticist policy. The balance between the weakening Atlanticism, growing Eurasianism, and increasingly popular nationalism could be assumed to lie on the right wing of Eurasianism, and the new course of Russian foreign policy implemented the result of this theoretical assumption.

In those terms, the expectations of the Moldovan leaders of finding support in the Russian government were not realistic, almost regardless of the activities of officials in Chisinau. Russia's hard-nosed policy toward Moldova was not shaped by international goals in the region, but reflected the distribution of forces in Russian politics.

The Eurasianist Period in Russian Foreign Policy

The period from winter 1992–1993 to today began with the resignation of Gaidar from his post of deputy prime minister and the announcement of a new Russian government on December 23, 1992. Surprisingly, such major events as the October crisis of 1993 and even the December parliamentary elections did not move Russian foreign policy any further from its initial position in early 1993. At this point, we can probably talk about the relatively stable balance of power in Russian foreign policy.

The major changes in the principal groups in foreign policy during this period could be briefly described as a junction of similarly oriented forces and a massive shift to the right. The six main groups of foreign policy elite that could be distinguished in 1991, now merged into two opposite camps: "Pro-Western group...merged with the moderate conservative group, as it did many of the moderate liberal faction. Many of the centrist and moderate-conservative party shifted closer to hard-liners on the problem of 'near abroad'...while hard-liners shifted closer to radical nationalist views represented by V. Zhirinovskiy" (Arbatov, 1994).

In Chisinau, supporters of the Moldovan–Romanian unification lost their last major positions with political power; under pressure from the majority of deputies, the chairman of parliament and the last three unionist-members of the presidium were forced to resign. A month later, parliamentary elections brought to power the Agrarians and Social Democrats (about 70 per cent of seats), while unionists collected only about 15 per cent of seats in the new Parliament.

The Moldovan government during this period was most friendly to Russia, the most pro-Moscow government in the entire post-*perestroika* period. While the pro-communist activists from the Dniester region were fighting on the side of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Chisinau supported Yeltsin, "emphatically endorsing his actions and portraying him as the champion of Russian democracy" (Socor, 1993a).

The expectations of the Moldovan leaders that they would be somehow rewarded for their support during the October rebellion in Moscow did not come true; the ingratitude of the Russian government greatly surprised the "realist" observers (Socor, 1993a). Kozyrev's "strategic response" rhetoric suggested that the Russian government as a hypothetical single player should respond to the "objective international circumstances" (such as the Moldovan support and the Dniester betrayal in October, 1993) by strengthening Russian ties with officials in Chisinau and by a massive anti-Dniester demarche. In reality, however, Moscow

“promptly moved to bury the issue [of Dniester support of anti-governmental forces in Moscow] and to exonerate its clients in Tiraspol” (Socor, 1993a) which made the “realists” (both Russian and Western) accuse Russian foreign policy of “unpredictability.”

The parallels between Moscow’s answer to Tiraspol’s support of the Yanaev coup in August, 1991, and Russian reaction to the Dniester activity in the October, 1993, rebellion are eloquent. While in 1991 a grateful Russian government, controlled by Atlanticists, backed the Chisinau side in its struggle against Tiraspol, neglecting numerous facts of discrimination on both the left and right banks of the Dniester, in the same situation in 1993 officials in Moscow chose to “distinguish” the problem of national determination of the Dniester region and the criminal activity of its leaders.

This reaction cannot be explained by the worsening situation in Moldova since there were many more legal and illegal possibilities for discrimination of ethnic Russians in 1991 than in 1993. It cannot be explained by the different nature of the Dniester participation in anti-Yeltsin actions, since in 1991 the Dniester participation was passive (mostly vocal support) while in 1993 actual fighters were sent to Moscow. It was obviously not a fear of losing Moldova from the Russian sphere of influence because in 1991 the probability of such a move was much higher.

The Moscow governmental support for the anti-Yeltsin separatists in the Dniester region should be read in the general context of bargaining between different forces in Russian politics. The absence of an immediate success in economic reforms drove the Atlanticist constituents into a camp of moderate opposition. Capturing the lost supporters, the Atlanticists faced the following choice: either to insist on their initial position which could lead to the total withdrawal of mass support, or to adjust both the domestic order vision and the accompanying grand strategy. The second option promised the essential constituency expansion in case the other competitors were to make the adequate adjustments, that is, if the entire spectrum were to shift to the right and leave the “leftest” spot for the former Atlanticists. If the opposition did not move to the right, the Atlanticist leaders would lose their distinctiveness and simply become absorbed by the group that first captured the spot currently wanted by the Atlanticists. Since the Atlanticist leaders preferred the second option, and the opposition responded by merging and moving to the right, by the end of 1993 Russian foreign policy was shaped by the bargaining between the two powerful groups that appeared in the wake of the Atlanticists’ shift: the moderate-conservatives and the nationalists.

The bargaining result cannot be any more positive for Moldova than the position of the moderate-conservatives. In fact, the actual result of the bargaining between the Eurasianists and the nationalists could turn out to be even less favorable to the Moldovan government if Kozyrev, who still remains, with a few exceptions, a “left among the leftests”, did not stay within “the leftest” possible group (moderate-conservatives) and did not use his powerful position to offset the growing weight of extreme nationalists.

In those circumstances, it is irrational to expect a “softening” of Russian policy toward Moldova as a result of Chisinau’s loyalty to Yeltsin’s government. Such a “softening,” although reasonable in terms of a response to world conditions, would lead to a confrontation with powerful groups in the current Russian leadership and would marginalize Kozyrev’s ministry. At the same time, it might also be true that Kozyrev could win more governmental support for Moldova if he was not forced to use relations with the “near abroad” as a bargaining chip in order to save what he considers more important—the remains of his policy toward the West.

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