

# ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN MOLDOVA

A Monograph  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN MOLDOVA by MAJOR Keith A. Barclay, U. S. Army, 79 pages.

The Moldovan Transdniester War of 1992 is illustrative of modern day ethno-national violence and yields unique lessons on the role and use of military power in dealing with and resolving such crises. Indecisive and necessary are two words that perhaps best typify the role that the armed forces played in this war. The full spectrum of military operations proved necessary to address this complex dilemma. The conflict provides many insights for developing U. S. Military doctrine and force structure to resolve revolutionary, civil, and insurgent wars. The Moldovan Military did not possess a truly full spectrum force; they were incapable of conducting high intensity tactical assault despite having air supremacy and artillery superiority. A lack of part of the modern combined arms force, tanks and assault guns, in the Moldovan military stymied any effective battalion or brigade level offensive operations. The insurgent Transdniester forces had a small amount of armor from the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army and easily defeated the mechanized infantry and anti-tank defenses of the Moldovans; the defenses were equally ineffective in both built-up areas and open terrain when the Moldovans fought the combined arms forces of the Transdniester. Strategically, both parties in the conflict used all of the instruments of national power with varying success in pursuing their respective goals; neither side was very effective. The Transdniester is not a recognized nation and Moldova has lost control of nearly all of its industrial territory; ethnic unrest escalated rather receded when the military was employed to keep the peace.

By examining the history of the region, the nature of ethnic conflict, and the conduct of the Transdniester War three lessons are drawn from this study. First, ethnic violence should be analyzed and addressed as a nationalistic movement by a group that is threatened, is seeking its own identity, and that feels that their ability to self determine is essential. The motivation for this movement is real and it is not ethnicity. Ethnicity is only the banner of the movement, not the cause of the movement. Second, when determining strategy for combating ethnic violence, during the assessment phase, remember that all groups have all the elements of national power at their disposal to varying degrees. International law and international recognition have little bearing on the availability of the instruments of power at the disposal of a group. Also, closely related is the understanding that international laws and conventions have little influence on illegal or unrecognized groups and movements, and the actions of such groups. Third, the ability of military forces to conduct full spectrum operations is essential to supporting national aims when dealing with ethnic conflict. The Transdniester War illustrated that preparedness was equal to full spectrum capabilities at the brigade level; asymmetry is a local tactical phenomena, and deploying forces to react to a crisis requires an ability to execute high intensity tactical assault if the enemy is prepared to defend. The Transdniester War and ethnic violence in Moldova are not over. Only an armistice exists to separate forces and prevent a rupture of the temporary peace. Ethnic violence seems routine in the twenty-first century and no new method of resolving ethnic disputes has arisen in the information age.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon earth through the years to come than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war.<sup>1</sup>

King George V, Message read at Terlincthum Cemetery, Boulogne, 13 May 1922

On a brisk winter day, cold, hungry, and poor, from his one room apartment window, a citizen and soldier of Moldova views the once bustling streets of his capital city, Chisinau. His new family sits quietly by his side, intermittently napping and dreaming the dream of peace. Where will he find the money for his families' next meal and to pay the rent? Resorting to black-marketing or crime may be the only viable answer. Smuggling, cars from Germany to Moldova for sale to the wealthy minority worked last year; he made a years salary in just two weeks during his annual leave from the military. His family cannot help since most of his relatives live across the river. Although it is the same country, he is not welcome, nor can he pass the checkpoint without fear of imprisonment. It has been nearly ten years since they have last seen each other even though only forty kilometers separate them. It bothers him that he is fighting the same army that he served in only a few years ago. He lost one of his soldiers the other day, a good trooper, with a bright future; his own countrymen killed him across the river while keeping the peace.

It is very cold and he is worried that his wife and daughter may get sick. The natural gas had stopped; his country could not meet the payments on the already extended note. Like his plight, so is the plight of his country, poor and at war against itself. He would like some

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<sup>1</sup>Tony Augarde, *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 89.

cigarettes, at about one dollar a pack though, he knows that it will severely strain his monthly salary of one hundred dollars. He cannot really afford it.

The other day at the military compound, he had to discipline one of his troopers severely for speaking Russian. "Only Rumanian may be spoken here," he said, as the trooper shivered in his boots and received his punishment of extra duty. Secretly he ensures his own family learns and practices Russian, and it eats at his soul that he publicly demonizes the Slavic peoples of the Transdnister to his own men. The country has been at war with itself nearly since its independence on 27 August 1991, the twenty-second anniversary of his very own birthday. Thoughts race through his mind, something drastic must occur to stop the fighting so that economic recovery can proceed, so that he and his family can live in peace, so the country can be whole again, so he can visit his family across the river. Nationalism must survive; it is the only hope he has left.<sup>2</sup>

### **Problem Background**

This is not the first time the region, and his country, has experienced war and its effects. The complexion of conflict in the Bessarabia region, Moldova encompassing most of the area, has a storied history of such conflicts. Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, German and Turkic interests in the region throughout history have left an indelible ethnic mark on the area. Some of the seeds of this diversity have sprouted instability during the recent collapse of the Soviet Union

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<sup>2</sup>Igor Gorgan, Lieutenant Colonel of the Moldovan Army, Interview by author, 5 November 2001 and 5 April 2002, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Notes and affidavit on citations in this work, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, (Hereafter cited as Gorgan).

The author derived the preceding narrative directly from numerous conversations with Igor Gorgan and his family. The statements are accurate in content although not in timing and sequence. Its purpose is to serve as an introduction of the nature of Moldova as a result of the Transdnister War. Igor Gorgan served as a Spetsnaz officer in the Soviet Army for four years. Once his country became independent in 1991, he returned to his country and became an officer in the Moldova Army.

and have manifested themselves as an ethnic conflict. Moldova is just one example of modern



ethnic conflict among the post Soviet satellite states.<sup>3</sup>

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These clashes are often typified by a strong desire for sub national self-determination amongst different national and ethnic groups attempting to protect their interests. The breakup of the Yugoslavian Balkan states into separate ethno - nationalist movements and the Russo-Chechnya conflicts are evidence of an ongoing disintegration of nation states.<sup>4</sup>

The perceived inviolate political boundaries of Moldova quickly fueled a partisan struggle for self-determination. On the east bank of the Dniester, the Slavic minority announced a self-declared republic separate from Moldova. Of course, the Moldavian Government took exception to this course and conflict followed. A demand for offensive measures quickly moved to the position of most desirable as Chisinau (the capital of Moldova) mobilized its military. Defensive measures would not solve their problem. Moldova moved to stabilize the situation on the east bank of the Dniester, by taking offensive action to secure their sovereign territory. The strategic aim was to regain control of the industrialized east bank of the river.

Chisinau conducted a poor estimate of the situation and the possible implications of their actions. In defining the problem the issue of identification of the adversary and the nature of the conflict, the root of the problem, was the first task Chisinau should have undertaken. Both routine and extraordinary military action has resulted in a sort of stalemate in the country. The enemy grew in complexity and capability when the resident Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army underhandedly, and without Moscow's public approval, aided the Slavic people of the Transdnister, and usurped Moldova's control in the region. In addition, economic pressure from Russia curtailed a hard military stance by the Chisinau government. The war has evolved into a smoldering armistice in the region, at least until a breeze again fans the flames into a escalating blaze of armed conflict. The military action was not decisive at the strategic level, if anything, the conflict escalated and ebbed with military operations but gained little progress at reuniting the country.<sup>5</sup>

Developing effective strategies for dealing with ethnic conflict must commence with a thorough understanding of the nature and theory of ethnic conflict. Through the use of the Transdniester War as a case study, this work is focused on developing a better understanding of the nature of ethnic war, understanding the roles and consequences of using military power in dealing with this conflict, and determining if there appear to be any doctrinal implications for the U S Military's involvement in such crises.

### **The Primary and Secondary Questions**

This monograph answers the question: Does the Moldovan Transdniester conflict illustrate the limits of military power in resolving ethnic violence? This question allows for a broad analysis of the effectiveness of the elements of National Power<sup>6</sup> in dealing with ethnic violence, and focuses on the military instrument of power. The secondary questions form the basis of chapters 2-4 of this monograph: What role did geography and history play in this crisis? What is the theory and nature of ethnic war? Does the conduct of the Transdniester War offer any insights on developing strategy for combating ethnic violence?

### **Methodology**

Initially a context for understanding the country of Moldova is examined. An analysis of the country's geography is necessary to provide a global perspective and understanding of the territorial issues involved in the conflict. Coupled with the geography, the history of the country is then explored to form a basis for understanding how the nation evolved over time to its present condition. While the geography and history of the country provide a contextual setting, the demographics and cultural uniqueness of Moldova are also important to understanding how the

geographic and historical situation fueled the ethnically linked demographic and cultural issues resident in the Transdniester War.

An understanding of the territorial and demographic ethnic divisions in Moldova necessitates the development of a broader understanding of ethnic conflict. The theory of ethnic war is examined using existing doctrine, and where none exists, it develops a working definition of ethnic war. Secondly, an examination of similar conflict types is conducted with which to compare ethnic violence. Third, an examination of those characteristics, which typify ethnic war, is conducted. With an understanding of ethnic conflict developed, the Transdniester War is then examined in further detail.

The nature of ethnic war in Moldova provides context to this case study of the Transdniester War in terms of ethnic nationalism. The surrounding and internal influences, which define the conflict nature, are examined to provide the contextual setting for exploring the conflict in detail.

The details of the conflict provide this study with the premises necessary to form the conclusions in the final chapter. Illustrating the proximate causes for the Transdniester War and providing a chronological record of the conflict facilitate an analysis of the strategies of the involved parties. Additionally, this examination provides the necessary supporting evidence with which to analyze the implications of using the instruments of national power in dealing with ethnic war. The implications derived are unique to this case study but should be illustrative of similar conflicts with the common denominator of ethnicity at their base.

Finally, the conclusion, the most important part of the monograph, offers an analysis of the effectiveness of the strategy implemented during the Transdniester War by examining the instruments of national power, and the thesis question is answered in context with the other instruments of national power. Next, the possible doctrinal implications of employing military

forces in ethno-national struggles are addressed using the U.S. Army's full spectrum operations doctrine as a construct.<sup>7</sup>

Several shortfalls arose during this examination. They are identified, and then framed as suggested areas for further study. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the major findings of this study.

### Summary

The direction this monograph took was unexpected. A preconception existed at the start of the research; modern ethnic war is an isolated phenomenon that would pass in relevance as the twenty-first century progressed. This study did not substantiate the preconception. Instead, it found that the same basic motives of ethno-nationalistic movements since recorded history began about 3000 years ago, still exist, and do not show any promise of becoming extinct in the information age.

In the book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, by Thomas Friedman, the Lexus car represents the future, change and progress; the olive tree represents the past, stability, and identity. Although Friedman is examining globalization in his book, he also captures the ever-present dichotomy between new and old; and this divide provides the fertile ground for the cultivation of ethnic nationalism. When this nationalism goes too far, ethnic violence may be sparked.<sup>8</sup> Friedman's 'olive tree' is mostly ethnicity:

Olive trees [ethnicity] are important. They represent everything that roots us, anchors us, identifies us and locates us in the world—whether it be belonging to a family, a community, a tribe, a nation, a religion or, most of all, a place called home. Olive trees are what give us the warmth of family, the joy of individuality, the intimacy of personal rituals, the depth of private relationships, as well as the confidence and security to reach out and encounter others. We fight so intensely at times over our olive trees because, at their best, they provide the feelings of self-esteem and belonging that are as essential for human survival as food in the belly. Indeed, one reason that the nation-state will never disappear, even if it does weaken, is because it is the ultimate olive tree—the ultimate expression of whom we belong to – linguistically, geographically, and historically. You cannot be a complete person alone. You can be a rich person alone. You can be a smart

person alone. But you cannot be a complete person alone. For that you must be part of, and rooted in, an olive grove.<sup>9</sup>

The Transdniester War in Moldova is illustrative of the tension between two separate ethnic groups that are fighting to cultivate their own olive grove in the post cold-war world.

## CHAPTER 2

### MOLDOVA IN CONTEXT

That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all lessons that history has to teach.<sup>10</sup>

Aldous Huxley, *Collected Essays* (1959), 'Case of Voluntary Ignorance'

#### Geography

Modern day Moldova is comprised of a land area not naturally or ethnically defined. The territorial dimensions of Moldova in 2002 match the boundaries that established the country as a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). The current borders of the country are not tactically sound for defense or topographically convenient for internal or external security. The Dniester River divides the country into two distinct regions that require separate and exclusive defensive schemes, and internal security plans. Additionally, the country's landlocked nature and small size render it economically impotent.<sup>11</sup>

Historically, Moldova was much larger and more logically defined. During its height, Moldova encompassed most of the land area from the eastern slopes of the Carpathians to the Dniester River, and from Galicia to the Black Sea; this area is also known as the gate from the Carpathians to the Black Sea. Its current land area is a result of political gerrymandering conducted during the Soviet era, and designed, in part, to reduce its key strategic importance.<sup>12</sup> Currently a landlocked nation, the country is slightly larger than Maryland. It is bordered on the west by Romania along the Prut River, on the east by a narrow strip of land called the Transdnister located on the eastern bank of the Dniester River, and on the north and south by the Ukraine.<sup>13</sup>

The land between the Prut River and the Dniester River is Bessarabia proper. This larger part of Moldova's terrain is generally very fertile steppe and lends itself to an agricultural based

economy. The country was late to industrialize and did so mainly during the middle of the twentieth century under Soviet guidance and aid. The western portion of the country remains predominately agrarian, most of the industry lies in the eastern portion of the country.<sup>14</sup>

Moldova has primarily an agricultural based economy. The western portion of the country, noted for its vineyards, was the primary producer of wine and other grape based distilled spirits for the Soviet Union. The Transdnister region houses the majority of the heavy industry, thirty percent of the goods producing industry and ninety five percent of the energy production, in the country. This region became a military industrial base during the Soviet era, producing steel, textiles, armaments, and other such goods. The people who work these plants are largely urbanized and are predominately skilled laborers, in contrast to the agrarian population of the West Country.<sup>15</sup>

The accessibility of the ground provides for easy invasion from its larger neighbors and its key location provided the historical motive for such invasions. All of its neighbors have invaded the country at one time or another to gain control of its Black Sea ports and trade route interchanges.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 1. Map of Current Day Moldova.



Source: Helen Fedor, ed., *Belarus and Moldova Country Studies*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 104.

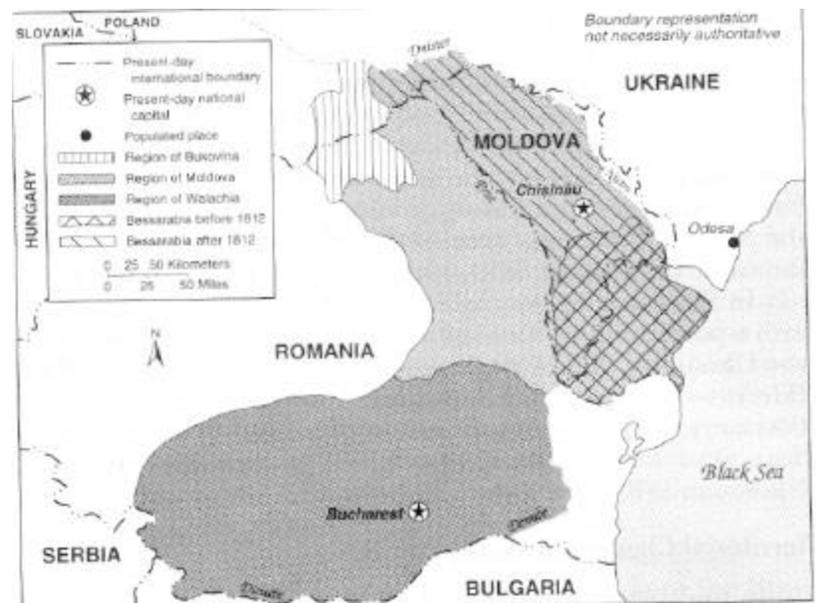
### History

Soluble borders and allegiances, driven generally by larger regional conflicts are routine in the country's history. Historic invasions and settlements have made the peoples of Moldova a diverse and multiethnic group. Moldova began as part of Dacia, a Roman settlement, from 105-271 A.D., and had many invaders until its borders formed a more permanent country in 1349.<sup>17</sup>

Extant history tells of nomadic peoples primarily of Romanian stock that occupied the region as a principality, served as a buffer of forward settlements for its western neighbors, and assisted their overlords in fighting Euro-Asian steppe invasions with limited success for centuries.<sup>18</sup> Under Hungarian suzerainty, a new principality was formed in 1349, under Prince Bogdan; his name was given to the land, and Bogdania became the new province. Bogdania was renamed Moldova for the Moldova River, currently in modern Romania.<sup>19</sup>

Hungarian hegemony became a new threat to the region's growing autonomy in the late 1300's. In response, by 1359 the Romanians attempted to define Moldova as a territorial state and call her to arms. Instead of being a forward outpost region the new state became a national entity for the first time in its history. The country was linguistically tied to its Latin roots in the West, and it territorially included the mouth of the Danube, Prut and Dniester Rivers. The new country gained economic prowess quickly; it controlled most of the trade that exited or entered from the Black Sea. The Moldovans had become the consummate middlemen of trade with the East.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 2. Map of Historic Strategic Development of Moldova.



Source: Helen Fedor, ed., *Belarus and Moldova Country Studies*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 108.

This new national identity turned subject against master in a two front struggle against Romania and Hungary that ensued for a generation. By 1387, the new power in Eastern Europe had become the Poland-Lithuania alliance, and Moldova allied herself with the new hegemon in an effort to stay Hungarian and Romanian intervention and invasion. With this new alliance came a period of considerable autonomy. Stressing their uniqueness, the country moved from Catholicism to Eastern Orthodox to further create an ethnic identity and culture of its own. It remained primarily agrarian based, but fueled by an increased Genoese trading post establishment and merchant activities in the region, a growing trader class was forming.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, during this period, a strong and able military class of nobles and free peasants evolved into a formidable force to counter invasion and to protect the growing trade enterprises that flowed from its being a crossroads of international trade.<sup>22</sup>

After several generations of economic growth and prosperity, the country had created a culture of multiethnic peoples, which included as the primary groups: Romanian, Italian, Hungarian, Turkish, and Polish. A nationalist movement fermented as stability and prosperity grew in the region. The new nationalism, cemented by several victorious wars, also verified the military prowess of the country.<sup>23</sup> As unique ethnic group the Moldovans have a recorded history from the late fourteenth century and claim the height of their culture as the period 1457-1504 A.D., under the rule of Stefan the Great. Originally, from Rumanian stock, the Moldovans shared the same base language, Romanian, and culture as their western neighbor, but had a professed uniqueness' founded upon their ancient hero's legacy of nationalism. Stefan successfully defended the autonomy of Moldova from Turkish, Polish, Hungarian, and the Crimean Khan invasions, and thus maintained a state that ranged from the Danube to the Dniester, and the Carpathians to the Black Sea. Stefan the Great became the symbol of nationalism in Moldova. This feeling was not lessened by the fact that his successes, as were his predecessors, purchased in part by paying 2000 gold pieces a year in tribute to the sultans of Asia Minor. Independence was fought for, but also bought and paid for by Stefan.<sup>24</sup>

The small state maintained its quasi independence for half a century, and in turn succumbed to total Ottoman Empire dominance in the early sixteenth century and remained an Ottoman satellite for nearly 300 years.<sup>25</sup> Aside from minor settlements, Turkish immigration was not widespread and the region retained its cultural and ethnic identity throughout this period.

Turkic control of Bessarabia eroded as a result of the 1787-91 Russian-Turkish War; the Yassy Treaty of 1791 divided the country into three pieces. In the treaty, the southeast became a part of Russia, the northern portion a part of Poland, and Turkey retained the southwestern portion of the country. The second Russian Turkish War, 1806-1812, again changed the regional boundaries and placed the area totally under Russian control. By 1812, Russia finally liberated

the entire region from Ottoman control and incorporated the small state into the Russian Empire. The Russian Empire had legally acquired all of Bessarabia in the Bucharest Treaty of 1812. This annexation marked the beginning of direct Slavic influence in the region, and was typified by a concerted effort by the Czar to Russify the area. By 1816, the movement to assimilate the Moldovans was fully underway. Civil schools stressed Russian as the primary language after a short period of dual language instruction, and eventually Russian speakers dominated the local government, thus Russification progressed via a new language.<sup>26</sup> From Imperial Russian annexation until the Russian Civil War, the identity of the country survived as a semi-autonomous country initially and then as a Russian province, albeit with the Czar as overlord for both.<sup>27</sup>

For a brief period, October 1917-December 1917, during the resultant chaos of the Russian Civil War and the Great War, the people on the West bank Dniester declared independence and formed the Bessarabian Peoples Democratic Republic. The East bank Dniester, the current Transdnier, became a possession of the Ukraine. This period of Bessarabian nationalism was short lived; Romanian forces marched into the country in December 1917 and coerced the fledging legislature to vote for unification with Romania. The country then became the northwestern province of Romania, little more than a buffer zone with the Ukraine, and eventually the Soviet Union in 1922.<sup>28</sup>

The inclusion of West bank Dniester Moldova as part of Romania fueled a dispute between the Soviet Union and Romania that lasted until 1940. The Kremlin did not recognize the inclusion of Bessarabia as a part of Romania and in 1924 formed the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) from territorial Ukraine (the Transdnier) in an attempt to delegitimize the Romanian annexation of Bessarabia, but Romania did not relinquish her reign over Bessarabia for sixteen years.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 3. Map Showing Boarder Evolution During Romanian/Russian/SovietEra.



Source: Helen Fedor, ed., *Belarus and Moldova Country Studies*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 109.

The rise of Nazi Germany as an eastern European power broker in 1939 provided the Soviet Union with another opportunity to regain Romanian Bessarabia. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact added legitimacy to the Soviet claim on the region by defining Bessarabia as in the Soviet sphere of influence, and contracted German support for eventual Soviet occupation. On 26 June

1940, Romania received an ultimatum demanding the delivery of Bessarabia to Soviet control; two days later, the Soviet Army took possession of the province in force.<sup>30</sup>

On 2 August 1940, the former MASSR, redrawn to incorporate northern Bessarabia, became a new republic in the Soviet Union as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). The southern portion, that which borders the Black Sea and all but 800 meters of the Danube River delta, became part of the Ukraine SSR.<sup>31</sup>

Romania, under Nazi direction, occupied the ancient principality during World War II and annexed the country. The Romanian Army occupied Moldova from 1941 until 1944. During this period, Romania reunited the southern province, temporarily Ukrainian, with the territory of the occupied MSSR; Bessarabia proper was merged again for only three years; by 1944, the Soviet Army had retaken the province and reestablished its prewar boundaries.<sup>32</sup>

During the post war Stalin regime a great emphasis on migration and industrialization of the East bank of the Dniester River, the Transdnister, occurred. This Slavic mark in the region is the forbearer of the current conflict. Increased Slavic, Russian and Ukrainian, migration to the new industrialized area took place after World War II and eventually shifted the ethnic balance in the left bank region to predominately Russian centric nationalities, as it remains today.

Commensurate with its break from Moscow, the SSR of Moldavia was renamed Moldova in an effort to break with the Cyrillic pronunciation that presumed Russian centricity; language is an ethnically unifying force for the Moldovan majority. Moldova gained its independence on 27 August 1991 from the former Soviet Union and almost immediately found itself immersed in ethnic conflict within its political borders. The larger agrarian area encompassing the west bank of the Dniester River is a Romanian centric culture and accounts for 65% of the population in the country. The industrial East bank accounts for 35% of the population and is Russian centric. The linguistic differences between the two regions of the country add to the secessionist movement in

the East bank area; the east bank majority speaks Russian and the west bank speaks a Romanian dialect.<sup>33</sup>

### **Religion**

Religion appears to play no measurable role in the Transdniester War. Ninety-nine percent of the population is Christian, one percent is Baptist, and ninety-eight percent is Eastern Orthodox. The remaining one percent practices the Jewish faith. The commonality of religion in Moldova does not appear to serve as a unifying force in the country.<sup>34</sup>

The Russian Church, Eastern Orthodox, perhaps works against any westward movement of the Moldovans. The Russification of the Church in the early nineteenth century served to create an eastward tilt in the region. It is unclear whether religion is playing a role to undermine any westward movement in the country.<sup>35</sup>

### **Government**

Moldova is a democracy and has a republican form of government with executive, legislative and judicial branches. The system is parliamentary in nature; the people popularly elect the chief of state, the president, and the unicameral parliament selects the head of government, the prime minister. A supreme court for the country embodies the judicial branch, and subordinate courts are locally established. The government currently has limited representation from the Transdniester because of the conflict and cannot enforce its laws or adjudicate legal cases their due to an inability to extradite persons for trial.<sup>36</sup>

### **Summary**

Nationalism and promotion of a unique ethnicity for the Moldovan people is not a new phenomenon to this country or region. Although a diverse people, the base culture and ethnic group remains predominantly of Latin origin and they speak a Latin derivative language. The

two major influences in the history of the region are Turkic and Russian. The Turkic influence in the region was long but subtle, and they allowed the country's culture to remain basically unscathed and unchanged. Only four percent of the current Moldavian population remains ethnically tied to a Turkic legacy, under the moniker of the Gagauz peoples.<sup>37</sup> The Russian influence was less subtle and Russification in 1816 began a national language struggle that still exists to this day.

With Russification came a major identity crisis within the country. The two languages dominated their respective portions of the country, and civil government swayed in power depending upon which language dominated the region. Twenty-seven percent of the population is of Slavic descent, and this population base is geographically concentrated in the Eastern portion of the state.<sup>38</sup> The religious hold of the Russian Church weakened during the Soviet era and official atheism, but religion remains a rare source of ethnic commonality in a region littered with separatist hubris. Language dominance remains a large source of friction in the country as it has since the early 1800's. Economic disparities between the East and West portions of the country have fuelled the divide, and the nationalist fervor of both regions. Will East or West dominate; whose nationalistic platform will prevail in the current struggle; which ethnic group will dominate?

A history of ethno-national struggles in Moldova is now established. With the introduction and background in mind, the monograph transitions to an esoteric examination of the nature and theory of ethnic war in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE THEORY AND NATURE OF ETHNIC WAR

Nationalism is an infantile sickness. It is the measles of the human race.<sup>39</sup>

Albert Einstein, In Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffman, *Albert Einstein, The Human Side* (1979), 38.

#### Introduction

The issue of taking diplomatic, economic and military action to secure national interests and people against actual or potential attacks from state or nonstate actors has become increasingly routine since the end of the cold war. The Soviet-Afghan War, immediately preceding the breakup of the Soviet Union, may have been predictive of this post Soviet era of regional conflict. These clashes often manifested themselves in a strong desire for sub national self-determination among different national and ethnic groups in an effort to protect their interests. The breakup of the Yugoslavian Balkan states into separate ethno-nationalist movements and the Russo-Chechnya conflicts are evidence of this ongoing dilemma. Another such ongoing case is that of the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldavia.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is important to propose a theory of ethnic war,<sup>41</sup> and define this type of conflict involved in terms of its characteristics, context, and nature, in order to understand and analyze the events of the Transdniester War.

Although similar in many respects to other types of conflict, ethnic conflicts seem to be unique in their nature and sense of purpose. First, a theory and definition of ethnic war are developed to provide a framework for examining the Transdniester War. This chapter starts in a broad context to develop a theory and definition of ethnic war and then attempts to describe the nature of ethnic war in the post Soviet era, followed by a narrower examination of the nature of Transdniester conflict. The role and challenge of military forces and strategists in dealing with

such conflicts differ significantly in situation and context from conventional small-scale conflicts or isolated wars. Ethnic is a descriptor that has evolved into ever increasing usage in military and societal circles. Yugoslavia, Afghan tribes, India and Pakistan, and Africa provide contemporary examples of recent conflict that have erupted in large part along ethnic lines.<sup>42</sup> What does ethnic mean?

### **The Theory Of Ethno-National War**

#### **Ethno-National Defined**

The term ethnic, derived from the Latin and Greek languages, ethnicus and ethnikos respectively, translates as, national. In French, the term is enthos and means nation or people. From these roots, the following English definition of ethnic has evolved: "of or relating to races or large groups of people classed according to common traits and customs."<sup>43</sup> The traits and customs are the standards of ethnic groups, must have originated during the formation of the initial small societal groups of people, and then evolved as larger groupings occurred over time. Ethnicity focuses on the differences between people rather than the commonalities.

Mainly, people are the same. Ethnic differences exist on the margins; they are not fundamental. Biology, chemistry, and physics affect all people generally in the same manner. Man alone has accentuated the differences between ethnic groups. This is resultant of the process of forming unique societies with a common identity. There must be common traits and customs that the individual members of the group can identify with. Aside from the time it takes to develop the group, this is basically the same process that occurs in a mass movement or a national movement. Eric Hoffer, an author who has explored movements of people in detail, has developed a list of those things that act as unifying agents among people: hatred, imitation, persuasion and coercion, leadership, action, and suspicion.<sup>44</sup>

First examined are the second and third unifying affects. The movement of a society, group of people, towards tribal or other governmental systems most likely required an indoctrination of sorts. The initial merger of individuals, small groups, and their idiosyncrasies into a larger group begins the initial process of identification with a new group identity. The individuals imitate the group norms. As new groups were assimilated and new generations were born into a society, both were indoctrinated in the group's identity through custom and traditions. They were either persuaded or coerced to conformity. Genetically and culturally, ethnic groups emerged over time with their own unique skin tints, language, history, and doctrine.<sup>45</sup>

Secondly, action is examined. People formed societies to take a collective action that the individual alone could not accomplish. Hunting, security, farming and building of shelter are group actions that bond people together in a common purpose. The group's actions are stronger than the individual's actions. Individuals acting in concert produce greater results than individuals can.<sup>46</sup>

Third, suspicion and hatred are explored together. As societies encountered other organized people outwardly different from themselves or were exposed to unexplained natural phenomena the natural emotion is one of suspicion of the unknown. This lack of understanding and trust drew the exposed society inward. The group will generally cling to the known, and those like themselves. Enmity then emerges in the group because of real or imagined threats to the identity of the society itself. The group's beliefs might be threatened by not accounting for the unknown. Those not like them usually become the enemies of the group, and the group emerges even stronger in its common hatred of others.<sup>47</sup>

Lastly, every group has formal or informal leaders. They may be the tribal elder, or the elected representative. The leadership function of any group provides the vision and direction of the society in addressing and executing all of the preceding unifying actions. They approve the

group's doctrine. The leaders are the spokesmen of the society, guide the group in suspicious times, and help focus the group's frustration on a common enemy.<sup>48</sup>

All of these unifying agents formed and maintained groups as they evolved into larger ethnic groups with common identifying traits. The remnants of the doctrine that bonded the people into groups initially have evolved into the current trappings of history, tradition, culture, custom, and religion found in societies today; these define the separate ethnic groups that exist today.<sup>49</sup>

Eric Hoffer indicates that indoctrination might form the basis, in part, for ethnicity. Groups of people became larger ethnic groups through a mass movement assimilating those in proximity to them. The residue of the doctrine that united them in the beginning provides identity to the individual people that make up the societal group. They often share and perpetuate the past through a common language of unique customs and history. The people became an ethnic identity in this way and perpetuated this uniqueness by procreating with each other and perpetuating their group's uniqueness. The group is more than the individual is; it provides an individual with power and identity. "The effacement of individual separateness must be thorough. In every act, however trivial, the individual must by some ritual associate himself with the congregation, the tribe, the party [ethnic group], etcetera." Over time, individual tribes and groups have become a people, an ethnic group. All over the world, this evolution took place, and different ethnic groups emerged. Each ethnicity developed into a unique culture with its own identity and symbolism. The practice of uniting individuals and groups is certainly not extinct.<sup>50</sup>

Stuart Kaufmann, author of a recent book about ethnic conflict, *Modern Hatreds*, echoes Hoffer's premise of the importance of a shared doctrine for groups, under the title 'ethnic symbolism': "The idea of ethnic symbolism is useful, therefore, because it combines the logic of ancient hatreds, manipulative elites, and economic rivalry stories."<sup>51</sup> The common customs and

identity of a group, or nation, largely define any ethnic group. All this ethnic symbolism and uniqueness is fundamental to every culture. However, where does ethnicity take on a negative pallor?

There are two major aspects of ethnicity that can make it the proximate cause for conflict. One is the struggle of the group or new identity to promote their uniqueness over another group, or just to obtain the right of self-determination for their own group. The second is the role of nationalism and nationalistic movement to assert an ethnic groups identity and to garner power over another group.<sup>52</sup>

The right of self-determination of a people is not a new concept. That it is an internationally recognized right of all people is the bedrock of modern democracy. A problem arises however when a new group emerges and wants to self determine and assert their identity within another groups territorial boundaries. There are no new lands to settle; the world is entirely subdivided into countries. New ethnic groups can no longer go it alone in a new frontier, like the Mormon migration. A minority ethnic group cannot migrate any longer and must assert their perceived rights in another's national domain. Therefore, currently a contradiction exists between the inviolability of borders of a sovereign nation, and the inalienable right of people to self determine.<sup>53</sup> The tension between these two does not necessarily lead to conflict, but when it does the transition usually begins with a nationalistic movement for self-determination.

Evolving nationalism at a small level is akin to ethnicism; both have identity as a key common denominator. Identity as a people, nation, or both, as the French prescribe by the term *ethnos*, drives groupings and political movements and is relative to external as well as internal crises in identity. "All that is left is the ethnic banner. Identification with a particular *ethnos* is a person's third immanent quality—after gender and age identification. Gender, age and national

identity are not chosen, everything else can be changed."<sup>54</sup> The crisis may be resolved by creating a new identity through ethnic nationalism.

Michael Ignatieff, in the *Warriors Honor*, describes ethnic war in terms of nationalistic movements or trends often manifested along ethnic lines. In his analysis, he focuses on a national identity rooted in the minor differences among people relative to the stability of the state. He asserts that: In an unstable state, new nationalist movements tend to form. Instability is the opposite of stability and disintegration of the state necessitates a new stability, one formed by a new nationalism often along differing ethnic lines. "There is nothing timeless about man's national identity. It's not some primordial essence, formed [solely] by history and tradition, latent within. For him identity is primarily a relational term . . . Nationalist ideology tries to fill the void [caused by state instability] within him."<sup>55</sup> Ignatieff further elaborates on identity: " Nationalism does not simply 'express' a preexistent [ethnic] identity: it 'constitutes' a new one."<sup>56</sup> The new nationalism caused by disintegrating states and the resultant turmoil has led to resurgence in ethnic definition and identification.<sup>57</sup>

So, ethnicity becomes negative when it forms the base of a new nationalist movement to assert or reassert a group's prerogative to self determine.<sup>58</sup> The movement is negative in nature because the identifying symbolism of the nationalist movement is that of an ethnic group. Necessarily, then, ethno-national movements today are exclusive of other ethnic groups. As the new ethnic identity becomes exclusive of others, conflict or war frequently evolve.<sup>59</sup> What is the motivation for war?

### **War Defined**

In general, man is motivated to initiate conflict through his action or reaction to just two influences. Security of the civilian population (stability) and their interests (identity), and security of economic means (stability and prosperity) are the two reasons conflict develops. If

one party or group feels that the other is disinterested in their situation or feels that the other threatens their identity in some way, in either reality or perception, their security is at risk. This is true for economic security as well.<sup>60</sup> If certain groups of people feel that they may not share equitably in a nation's wealth due to an actual or perceived prejudice, cause for concern and anxiety is natural.<sup>61</sup> If not stabilized the situation may devolve into armed conflict, war. What is war?

"War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,"<sup>62</sup> according to Carl von Clausewitz, the preeminent theorist on warfare, most militarists accept this definition. The United States Military apparently views the term "war" as having a self-evident definition, and it does not put to words any specific meaning that is not commonly accepted. It is then safe to assume that the common dictionary definition of war, "the struggle between opposing forces for a particular end,"<sup>63</sup> and Clausewitz's combine adequately to represent the doctrinally accepted usage of the term. The following definition is the basis for our further discussion: War is an act of force between opposing people(s) in pursuit of a desired goal, condition, or objective.<sup>64</sup> The goal, condition, or objective might be identity, economic need, and self-determination via a nationalist movement in ethnic war.

### **Doctrinal Types of Conflict**

Ethnic war is not a defined term in United States military doctrine. The three terms closely related to ethnic war in today's doctrine evolved and were retained during a period of two opposing super power nation states, the United States and the Soviet Union. The ideological identity of these two giants suppressed fledging nationalist movements and stabilized, for the most part, through force, or threat of force, ethnic movements. As the world situation evolved after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and ethnic movements emerged from the regional instability thus created, military doctrine seemed to lag behind.<sup>65</sup> It is beneficial, however, to

define military conflicts, when practicable, with a common doctrinal term that facilitates a directed analysis capable of quickly discerning the nature and context of a given problem; and it can help to identify a strategy for resolving the crisis. Defining the following terms allowed strategists to provide the necessary context to their problems in a bipolar world, a world that no longer exists.<sup>66</sup>

Three terms currently describe ethnic war. This type of war bears many of the marks of a civil war, revolutionary war, and an insurgency, but it remains distinct due to the predominance of the ethnic divide between the sides. The geographic settlement of regions along these ethnic lines is a major characteristic in this type of war and marks it as a unique type of conflict worthy of a moniker of its own.<sup>67</sup> A position of this monograph is, that it is necessary to understand the nature of a conflict before applying resources to resolving the crisis, and that illustrating the unique nature of ethnic war will make the term more descript and useful independently or as a prefix to the three terms routinely used to describe these types of conflict.

### **Revolutionary War**

A revolutionary war is a conflict in which a group attempts to effect a social or political change using extreme measures, namely, organized armed conflict.<sup>68</sup> This definition is broad and fits the Transdniester War case in terms its goal, which is to effect political change through armed conflict. To define the conflict as merely a revolution would be correct, but insufficient to describe the nature of the conflict in any way but cursory manner regarding the adversaries. In ethnic war, the "group" is not a political coalition or a social sect, but a race or ethnically homogenous body bonded by more than a common cause; language and genes are tangible and provide for a new identity. However, from the perspective of the people from the Transdniester, they might very well call the conflict a revolution.

## **Civil War**

A civil war is: "a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country."<sup>69</sup> This term is more descriptive and describes the Transdniester conflict accurately to an outsider. The opposing factions however do not see themselves as from the same country, and aside from succession, fiercely hold to the belief that two independent nations are fighting each other. The U.S. Civil War for example, illustrates this point; from the northern perspective, Federals viewed it as a civil war, but from the southern perspective, Confederates viewed it as a war of independence. The similarities of a contiguous portion of the country succeeding and attempting to establish a separate state is striking, however the genesis of this conflict is less political and economic than it is ethnic. Even if the root issues are political and economic, a nationalist fervor may have suppressed and cloaked these motivations and given rise to ethnicity as the most visual trait of the conflict.

## **Insurgency**

An insurgency is: "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict."<sup>70</sup> Again, this term is accurately descriptive of the conflict in Moldova. This term is only partially correct and is not descriptive of the conflict in total. The Transdniester is not attempting to overthrow the government of Moldova as a whole; they are only interested in their region gaining independence. Hence, the insurgent's desire is for only partial governmental overthrow, in terms of lessening territorial domain, rather than a complete restructuring. The point of departure for ethnic war from insurgency is one of scale and perspective. A paper government not in total control of its territory or people is fighting not for existence, but to suppress subdivision of its country by separate ethno-nationalist movements. A government embroiled in ethnic conflict is more closely related to being in a civil war, with insurgents that share a common identity as the enemy.

## Characteristics of Ethnic War

Therefore, ethnic war is unique in that the opposing sides often have a ready made uniform of language differences, religious differences, complexion variances and cultural differences that make up their identity.<sup>71</sup> They might speak a different language, wear different cloths, and be more urbanized, or have different political views. It is easy to determine who is on the other side regardless of a textile uniform. This aspect of ethnic conflict often blurs the distinction between civilian and soldier and provides a unique dynamic to ethnic conflict.<sup>72</sup> The differences might be slight to an outside observer, much like all monkeys may look alike to humans, but to the resident monkey population the subtle differences are loud and unmistakable. Each opposing side of the conflict cultures their differences much the same way as man cultures an artificial pearl. An irritation, unnaturally implanted into a shellfish, becomes the product of human intervention rather than a natural product of the environment. In the shellfish case, the result is a pearl, and in the case of bigotry, the result is often ethnic conflict. Bigotry and hatred do not necessarily have to be rooted in visual differences; the key difference might be audio, language.

Language is the vehicle of culture and usually the single most defining element of any group of ethnic peoples.<sup>73</sup> Socialization, cultural interaction, trade, and the ability of peoples to petition a government or society for redress of grievances, is rooted in common language. Assimilation of one group into a disparate ethnic group means that a common language must evolve, through either adoption or evolution. Where linguistic differences exist within a country, that are not offset through bilingual norms, one language usually dominates over the other and the result is often manifested by ethnic domination of one group over another through majority governance. One way to resolve this inferiority is to eventually assimilate into the majority culture and become a multiethnic society with a common language. The other is to gerrymander

a new district, or such area, in which the minority becomes the majority and thus self-determines in a new sovereign country. This action requires secession, but secession requires mutual consent of all parties involved. If mutual consent is absent, the opposing ethnic group becomes the adversary.<sup>74</sup> "For peoples seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential, and [are] the potentially most dangerous enmities."<sup>75</sup> Thus, two opposing ethnic groups can become enemies in a conflict for self-determination via a new nationalist movement.

### **Ethnic War Defined**

Ethnic war can then be defined as an ethno-nationalist movement resulting in a civil war, revolutionary war, or insurgency using any or all available elements of national power (political, economic, informational, and military), in which each opposing party's aim is political and economic self-determination, or hegemony, over another ethnic (linguistic) group or groups of peoples in a given area that are threatening each other's identity.

### **The Nature of Ethnic War in Moldova**

The Transdniester War seems similar to all three of the types of wars mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. The conflict is a civil war from the perspective of the Moldavian's as a whole; it is most likely what all sides would choose to call the conflict. From the perspective of the East bank Dniester Republic; it is a revolution, very much in the Russian tradition of the Bolsheviks. From the West bank Moldovan side it is viewed as an insurgency.<sup>76</sup> Trying to look at the conflict objectively and unattached is difficult and any or all of the biases previously noted would be narrowly accurate.

Inclusively, the conflict can be described as an ethnic conflict between Russian centric and European centric groups, both fighting for self-determination and economic prosperity on the same piece of ground. The ground was once part of the former Soviet Union.

## Former Soviet States Context

In the book, *The Russia We Lost*, Stanislav Govorukhin indicates the drive of the people of the former Soviet Union to rebuild and reinvent a new ethnic nationalism, a new identity:

Russia is a puzzling, unknown country. It has turned out that we know nothing about it. Therefore it is probably why we have lived with such difficulty and so stupidly. Where is the path to renaissance? A people without its own clan, without tribes, without parents, without history, without historical experience, will never be able to get onto that path. Thus, we have to remember who we are, who are parents, who is the mother of our land.<sup>77</sup>

The case of the Transdniester War falls into the larger construct of the former Soviet states, and as such, it is depictive of the nature of this ethnic war. The political environment of the former Soviet Union served to suppress much of the ethnic conflict currently evidenced in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Bessarabia today. The Russian dominance of the Soviet era served to diminish the importance of ethnicity through enthroning socialism as a state political system. The downplaying of ethnic characteristics and the promotion of the "Soviet" served to suppress existing ethnic nationalism, but not erase it. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dominance of Russian socialist political control evaporated, leaving the root ethnic concerns again the dominant political force. During the Soviet Union's existence, ethnic groups migrated, often by direction, to other parts of the nation. This mixing of ethnic groups into the former satellites has diluted the homogeneity the satellite countries had before Soviet Russification occurred. Therefore, the nature and scale of ethnic conflict in the former USSR states, in part, is derivative of the Soviet regime and is apparently not politically manageable within many of the fledging independent republics. Moldova is such a case.<sup>78</sup>

By the middle to late 1980's, economic hardship, political weakening, and a rise in ethnic unrest emerged on the periphery of the Soviet Union. All of these factors changed the ethnic status quo, stability, of post World War II. The governmental restructuring from autocracy to democracy and the economic movement from a command economy to market economy, that

occurred during this period, provided the central Soviet government with more crises than they could handle, and erased the repression and pacification that held ethnic conflict in the region at check for so long a time. Religion reemerged; cultural identity had a resurgence, including language centrality, and political boundaries. These were of little importance during the Soviet era. The boundaries were little more than a county or state boundary would be in the United States, but they became increasingly relevant as the Soviet yoke dissolved, in that they were culturally and ethnically illogical in most instances.<sup>79</sup> In all these cases, Moldova bears witness to the veracity of the importance of a greater nationalism in maintaining stability.<sup>80</sup> Michael Ignatieff proposes:

Note here the causative order [of ethnic conflict]: first the collapse of the overarching state, then Hobbesian fear [interethnic war], and only then nationalist paranoia, followed by warfare. Disintegration of the state comes first, nationalist paranoia comes next. Nationalist sentiment on the ground, among the common people, is a secondary consequence of political disintegration, a response to the state order and the interethnic accommodation that made it possible. Nationalism creates communities of fear, groups held together by the conviction that their security depends on sticking together. People become 'nationalistic' when they are afraid; when the only answer to the question 'Who will protect me now?' becomes 'My own People.'<sup>81</sup>

By 1991, fifteen former Soviet Republics formed successor states from the former Soviet Union, and began experiencing sovereignty for the first time in the living memory of most of their citizens. Parted from Moscow, the fledging states turned countries chose two general directions regarding governmental structure, foreign politics, and cultural orientation. None of them had any practical experience or an existing bureaucracy to sway them by routine. Only history and ethnicity provided them with tendency. The Baltic States, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, directed their efforts westward. The remaining twelve states chose the security blanket of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a confederation of sorts along military and economic commonality.<sup>82</sup>

The CIS, in a short time, devolved into a two party confederation of sorts. "They [the CIS states] had coalesced into two groups, one of which may be termed Russophiles, the other westerners. The westernizing states wished to maintain their independence from Russia, whereas the Russophiles sought a close bilateral or multilateral alliance with Moscow."<sup>83</sup>

This polarization, often echoed within the states themselves, drove a social wedge of disharmony in many of the countries. With nearly twenty five million Russian speaking peoples living in these former states, the language was a common custom and tradition to which ethnic solidarities could bond, of which Moldova is a case in point. The Soviet hegemony of the former East bloc was not total; some of the countries, like Rumania, East Germany, Poland and others, had existing armies, police forces and bureaucracies. The countries mentioned had existing means to deal with spawning ethnic unrest Countries that appeased or quickly established control of their new governances stayed the tide of organized succession by neo-nationals.<sup>84</sup>

Immediate democratization of an authoritarian state has its difficulties when different groups vie for power, and so called equality. It gives rise to individuality, often defined initially by ethnicity. This seems particularly germane to the case in Moldova, closely related to Romania in culture and language; its problems in the Transdnier were nested in the transition from communism to capitalism. Robert Kaplan, a renowned author of several books on the region and emerging areas of conflict, provided an insight into this phenomenon when interviewing Romania's president:

Question: "What is the hardest thing you've had to learn [since independence from The Soviet Union]?"

Response: "That we are not all equal. The passage from dictatorship to democracy is a passage from collectivist to the communal ideal. Collectivism annihilates the individual, while community means association of individuals [often along ethnic lines]. And in rediscovering our individuality, we find that some are more intelligent than others, some work harder, some are more innovative, some are luckier and in better position to acquire wealth. Competition means unsentimental selection of the best. This was done with the utmost toughness in Britain and America. It is only important that there be equality of

opportunity, not equality of result. To say to a people...whose individuality has been crushed by communism, that they are all equal is an insult. Because this was a hard truth to accept... Communism seduced us with the lie of equality, which in practice turned out to be rule by the lowest among us."<sup>85</sup>

Ethnocentricity in the CIS and other former Soviet countries was fueled by democratization and a drive for supporters in the West or in the East. In Moldova, the two divides coalesced into ethnic rivals for power and protection, one western in orientation and one eastward. In the West bank side of Moldova, power was derived from existing self-governance and the protection was provided through the state Army. In the East bank, a new governmental coalition was formed and was supported by the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army. The seeds of conflict described earlier in this chapter were present: A need to secure the respective ethnic civilian population and their interests, and the need to provide security of the group's economic means.<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, it seemed that the Moldovan people subconsciously realized the ethnic tide had grown beyond control in dividing the country and in 2001 became the first former satellite of the Soviet Union to elect a Communist government back into power. Perhaps this sway away from democracy, in name, will eventually lessen the ethnocentric divide and focus the nation on a new nationalistic trend that is not tied to ethnicity.<sup>87</sup>

Enrid Aleav, in his paper "Regional Ethnic Conflicts" has distilled four major conclusions from his study of several ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union: First, the conflicts are not accidental and have resulted from extensive preparation of a movement. Second, there is a real need, or desire, that has given motive to the conflict, its rasion d'etre. Third, the root of the problem that is hidden by ethnicity, new nationalism, and a new identity is economic in nature. Fourth, the protagonists either initially have a criminal type character, or they acquire this character during the conflict.<sup>88</sup>

### **Summary**

The nature of the Moldovan case, at least for the near future, is inextricably tied to its economic situation. The Soviet legacy lives on in Moldova as it does in other former Soviet satellites. The centrally planned Soviet economy ceased to exist upon the collapse of the USSR. Therefore, without the directives governing production quotas and the bureaucracy that marked the systems management, it devolved into near chaos. Economic power necessarily passed to the local managers of plants and other works resulting in a new power base at the local level. The Transdnister houses the industrial base of Moldova and many of the local plant leadership is of Russian orientation and not ethnic Moldovan. Economic prowess and control, in Moldova, evolved into the political circles and an increasing role for the Russian-speaking minority developed in all disproportion to their numerical representation.<sup>89</sup>

Energy tends feed the engine of an industrial nation. Not having natural resources of its own, Moldova imports all of its oil, coal and natural gas mainly from Russia and is therefore is dependent upon positive relations with Russia for its light, heat and economic fuel.<sup>90</sup> A unique situation exists in Moldova's fight to control their country. Russia provides most of the country's raw material needs, while Moldova is simultaneously at war with the Russian-speaking people of the Transdnister. A tense relationship exists between the two governments, one that greatly affects diplomatic, economic, and military action.

The case of Moldova and the Transdnister War is one of an internal war that has polarized the opposing sides along ethnic lines. Now that a general theory of ethnic war has been examined and the nature of the Transdnister War has been described and put in the context of the former Soviet states, a more detailed examination of the causes and conduct of the war are explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE TRANSDNIESTER WAR

A Nation spoke to a Nation, A Throne sent word to a Throne: 'Daughter am I in my mother's house, But mistress in my own. The gates are mine to open, As the gates are mine to close.'<sup>91</sup>

Rudyard Kipling, *Departmental Ditties* (1898 US ed.), "Our Lady of the Snows"

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet, Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgement Seat; But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from ends of the earth.<sup>92</sup>

Rudyard Kipling, *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892), "The Ballad of East and West"

#### Introduction

The deep-rooted catalysts for conflict in the Bessarabia region form a long list: language differences between the Eastern and Western parts of the country (Russian versus Romanian), economic differences between the two regions (industrial versus agrarian), cultural differences (Slavic versus Latin), both sides want self determination, both sides are reasserting identity, and both sides were nationalistic. However, the immediate causes for the Transdnier War began just before Moldovan Independence from the Soviet Union was declared in 1991.

The pending disintegration of the Soviet Union was gradual, and this in turn provided the fledgling state many opportunities to evaluate their future. Moldova saw some problems in the transition and attempted to ease into independence by addressing several inflammatory issues in their declarations and constitutions.<sup>93</sup> However, the geographical and demographic divisions of the SSR did not translate smoothly into a Moldovanized Nation despite their efforts.

Independence, self-determination, and nationalism, were followed by conflict. Nationalism for Moldovans primarily meant the displacement of Russian as the primary language of the country,

a westward inclination to Romania and beyond, and de-Sovietizing the economy and civil bureaucracy.<sup>94</sup>

### **The Causes and Conduct**

The late 1980s initially fuelled a nationalist movement in the MSSR to reintroduce Romanian as the dominant language of the country. In 1987, the Moldovan Supreme Soviet passed legislation displacing the Russian language in favor of the Romanian language in the media, arts, and the schools; and immediately Public disaffection in the Transdnier region of the country ensued. In response to the public outcry, a study was commissioned by the government in 1988 to examine the problem. It returned in favor of Romanian being the dominant and official tongue of the SSR.<sup>95</sup>

The language dispute became a central political issue in the republic by the late 1980s, and the Moldovan government passed a more exclusive law that relegated Russian to an interethnic communications language, all other functions of the state would be conducted in Romanian. By the summer of 1989, the languages were granted an official co-equal status with the important caveat that Latin replaces Cyrillic characters. The last act can be seen as nothing but inflammatory, and it was successful.<sup>96</sup>

With the language movement again underway, the Moldovan SSR declared itself an independent republic in June 1990, and continued on its nationalistic path of disaffecting the Slavic influences. Conscription of Soviet soldiers in the republic was abolished, the occupation of the Soviet 14<sup>th</sup> Army was declared illegal, and the language reform law of 1989 was strictly enforced.<sup>97</sup> Alienation of the minority groups in the country was the primary side effect of the new Moldovan nationalism.

The primary disaffected minority group of the nation was the Slavic, Russian and Ukrainian, people of the Transdnier who were alienated by every step of the aforementioned

Moldovan Nationalism. Geographically, the eastern portion of Moldova is home to the Slavic minority; the people speak Russian, and in the main do not have as a second language Romanian and they have eastward ties in culture and history, not western. The Slavic minority is resident in and in control of the industrial base of the country, the Transdnister, and have positive feelings toward the former Soviet, now Russian, bureaucratic and economic systems that had treated them well in the past.<sup>98</sup>

The multiethnic country of Moldova evolved into two rival groups upon its declaration of Independence, the Moldovan Nationals and the Slavic Nationalists. The Slavic nationals are an amalgamation of the Russian speaking minorities of the Transdnister. Of the 750,000 people in the Transdnister, forty percent are Moldovan (one half of which are Russified), twenty-five percent are Ukrainian, and twenty-three percent are Russian. By uniting the Russian and Ukrainian people, the Slavic group gained a majority in the region. The rivals, each with a regional majority quickly became adversaries.<sup>99</sup>

As with most separatist movements, there is a demagogue at its head, and the Slavic Nationalists of the Transdnister are no exception. In the fall of 1990, with Moldovan Independence on the horizon eleven months in the future, the Transdnister peoples found in Igor Smirnov a leader whom they could place at the head of a new government in a self proclaimed country. On 3 September 1990, with Smirnov at the head, the Slavic Separatists in the transdnister created the Dniester Moldova Republic, with its capital in Tiraspol. This Dniester Republic, commonly referred to as Transdnister, although not internationally recognized, exercises sovereign control of the Transdnister region. Igor Smirnov explains the position of the secessionists:

This was the legitimate consequence of spreading nationalism on the territory of the former Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. In our [Transdnister] view, individual rights have priority. However, national rights are given priority over anything else in Moldova. Considering the national composition of the population living beyond the

Dniester River, this controversy would have led to the current conflict sooner or later. At the very beginning, the Dniester area parliamentary deputies proposed the creation of a free economic zone in the area. They called us secessionists and accused us of trying to dismember Moldova, this 'Ancient Romanian land.' Later we proposed the creation of autonomy here. Why? Because in the euphoria following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Moldovan Parliament adopted laws that discriminated against some of their population. On top of it, they also declared the need to create Greater Romania. Naturally, all this alarms our population, because the area beyond the Dniester has never been a Romanian land. We recognized the right of nations to self-determination, but a referendum should be held on the issues of independence or unification with other countries.<sup>100</sup>

Ethnocentricity and the resultant language differences together played the major part in igniting the Transdniester War. The lack of diversity throughout the country in its population base locations became the petray dish that allowed demagogues in the Transdniester to rise in power and influence against the Chisinau government of Moldova. Smirnov rose to power with the support of the Slavic majority in the Transdniester. His ethnic Russian affiliation was not insignificant in giving him legitimacy. The foundation of the Tiraspol Government originated in 1989, a group called The United Council of Work Collectives, OSTK, whose charter lie in combating Romanian nationalism, formed as a political party in response to the Language Act that placed the Romanian tongue over the Russian in the SSR.<sup>101</sup> In seeking to retain his power and influence, independence from Chisinau would guarantee that the Slavic majority in the Transdniester would remain Russo centric. Additionally, the industrial base of Moldova lay in the Transdniester, and therefore the economic might of the region would be under Transdniester control and the prosperity for the new state ensured.<sup>102</sup>

Initially, the period from 1989-1990 was typified by an intellectually based conflict; the situation did not take root in a social revolution until late in 1990 and it escalated even more upon Moldovan independence in 1991.<sup>103</sup> Initially, the elected representatives of the Transdniester region continued to play an active part in the MSSR's, Chisinau, government, and by 1990 the OSTK had gained a majority of the east-bank seats in the Moldovan Supreme Soviet, the

governing body of Moldova until independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The OSTK proposed a free economic zone to the Chisinau government in June of 1990 to no avail.

Opposing the positions taken by the OSTK, the west bank Moldovan Popular Front party retained control of the Supreme Soviet, thwarted any attempts at Transdnierster autonomy, and retained its Moldovan nationalist platform.<sup>104</sup> The situation continued to smolder for the next several months.

On 19 August 1990, the very small Gagauz minority in southeastern Moldova declared a small autonomous state of its own within Moldova.<sup>105</sup> Although this incident was not a real threat to Moldova's control in the region and was quickly resolved by force, it served to provide precedence for the Transdnierster and by 3 September 1990 the Transdnierster declared itself an independent SSR of the Soviet Union under the leadership of Smirnov and the OSTK.<sup>106</sup> With the proclamation of sovereignty by the Dniester Republic came escalated tensions with the Chisinau government.

The perceived inviolate political boundaries of Moldova quickly fueled the partisan struggle for self-determination. Of course, the Moldavian Government took exception to this course and conflict followed.<sup>107</sup> A demand for offensive measures quickly moved to the position of most desirable as Chisinau (the capital of Moldova) mobilized its military. Defensive measures would not solve their problem. Moldova had to stabilize the situation on the east bank of the Dniester; they had to take offensive action to secure their sovereign territory. Diplomacy led the charge in an effort to diffuse the problem before it escalated into armed conflict.

Mikhail Gorbachev, then president of the Soviet Union, attempted to quell the crisis by declaring the two upstart republics null and void by decree in December of 1990. Although resident in the Transdnierster, the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army played no role in enforcing the decree evidencing a lack of influence, or sincerity, of the Soviet position towards the republic.<sup>108</sup> Diplomatic measures were not successful and had little influence in resolving the crisis. The

failure of the Soviet Union to recognize the new republic probably served to solidify the resolve of the OSTK to fight for sovereignty from Moldova.

By August of 1991, Moldova gained full independence from the Soviet Union, and the authority to solve the Transdniester crisis without needing official Soviet sanction, but support from Moscow was still important.<sup>109</sup> The Transdniester Government and the OSTK party sponsored the coup d'etat against the Moscow Government in 1991, while the Chisinau Government sponsored the resident government in Moscow by capturing Smirnov and incarcerating him in West bank Moldova for his role in the coup attempt.<sup>110</sup> The opposing allegiances of the two factions being what they were indicate that external recognition from Moscow retained its importance in resolving the Transdniester conflict, albeit with different mentors at the seat of power. Diplomatically, the Chisinau Government had the upper hand in the Transdniester conflict. Internationally, Moldova controlled both banks of the Dniester, but in reality, two sovereign powers existed.

The conflict, still mostly peaceful, progressed in design from the diplomatic to the economic instrument of power in late August of 1991. In order to free their leader, Igor Smirnov, the Tiraspol Government organized a rail blockade from the Ukraine and Russia to West bank Moldova. The rail is the main source of imports and raw materials into the country, and the action was successful in garnering the release of Smirnov. Upon his release, new elections held in the Transdniester reseated the incumbent Smirnov, and a referendum affirmed, by a seventy-five percent to twenty-five percent margin, Dniester independence from Moldova.<sup>111</sup>

Loyal Moldovan police forces occupied stations and urban centers throughout the Transdniester, but they were unable to influence the OSTK or the economic blockade that occurred in 1991.<sup>112</sup> With its newfound independence, the Chisinau government busily engaged itself primarily with establishing the bureaucracy and institutions of an independent country,

including an Army.<sup>113</sup> The Transdnister issue would have to take second place until the means to deal with the issue, the Army, was fully developed and equipped.

The Moldovan Army currently consisted of about 12,000-15,000 soldiers formed into three combined arms brigades consisting of: a truck mobile battalion, a BMD equipped mechanized battalion, and a tank battalion. Additionally, an artillery brigade, an aviation brigade, an air-defense brigade, a peacekeeping battalion, a special forces battalion, a military police battalion and an honor guard battalion support these forces. The equipment for the tank battalion could not be funded and existed only of personnel.<sup>114</sup> The Moldovan government could not afford more than this and had to pay for the equipment they had by selling the majority of their fixed wing Air Force to the United States Government. The MIG-29s, left from the Soviet era, provided Chisinau with a bartering tool to fund their new Army. The highest bidder was the United States, and in addition to money received for the sale of the aircraft, the Moldovan military gained a large quantity of military trucks and associated equipment.<sup>115</sup>

The task of the Transdnister government following the declarations of independence of August and September 1991 was the same as in Moldova. Part of developing the new government required the creation of an Army capable of resisting Chisinau and securing their interests in the Transdnister. The resident Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army in Transdnister made the issue of equipping a modern military less of a problem for Smirnov. The loyalty of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army is derivative of the commander's loyalty. General Aleksandr Lebed, the commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, is ethnically tied to Russia. Although, part of the Russian Army in name, the soldiers are also predominately Russian and Ukrainian and are residents of the Transdnister.<sup>116</sup> When asked about withdrawing the 14<sup>th</sup> Army during an interview, Russia's official position is to withdraw the Army; Lebed indicated the real loyalty of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, which is clearly pro-Transdnister:

[On withdrawing the 14<sup>th</sup> Army] This is clearly unrealistic . . . The principal problem is that the army is deployed on the territory of the unrecognized Trans-Dniester [sic] region.

Legally, this is Moldavia [sic]. But, neither the laws nor the constitution of Moldavia [sic] applies here. That is, this is alienated territory. In any case, the army's withdrawal, which the Bolsheviks [Russian's] discussed . . . may be completely stymied . . . withdrawing the army doesn't benefit anyone at all. There is a balance of forces there now. The mindless disruption of this balance would close the ring of fire . . . Therefore, one must proceed from today's realities and consider what the people who live on these territories want.<sup>117</sup>

If the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army formed the silent power of the Transdnierster Republic, it had vocal support from other paramilitary forces. Slavic volunteers from outside the region carrying the moniker of Don Cossacks augmented the Dniester Republic Guards (DRG), the unofficial official Army of Transdnierster. Together these forces comprised the military of the Transdnierster. Additionally, the Transdnierster forces had the advantage of controlling the substantial munition plants and arms factories, formerly Soviet enterprises, situated along the east bank of the Dniester River.<sup>118</sup>

The diplomatic and economic instruments of national power did not resolve the crisis in favor of either party and a period of relative stability ensued for about four months while each side continued to develop their fledging military instruments for action. Public diplomacy failed for the Dniester Republic, they could not garner international recognition. However, they had not abandoned hope of economic action and the Tiraspol government continued to apply the economic instrument of power, and secured Russian Bank deposits in the newly created State bank of the Dniester Republic. Now with capital and a functioning bank system separate from Chisinau the time for military action quickly approached. The Transdnierster Republic initiated military action in an effort to displace the Moldovan police forces stationed in the region, with the objective of asserting total control of the East bank.<sup>119</sup>

Small scale fighting began during the first several months of 1992, it was a routine occurrence, and resulted in the seizure of several police stations and military arsenals in the Transdnierster region by the Dniester Republic Guards and the Don Cossacks. The military depot

seizures, near Tiraspol, were more a result of collusion between the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army and the DRG than of armed seizure, and the loot substantial. The Russian president had the following to say:

Unquestionably, there are supporters of the Dniester region among the Fourteenth Army's officer corps, and they are beginning to switch over, sometimes with equipment, to the side of the Dniester people. That is why Snegur, among others, regards this as a direct intervention. But this is not intervention by Russia, it is the defense of the people living there, [undertaken] on the personal initiative of the officers living there.

I have issued additional written instructions to Gen. Lebed, whose essence boils down to the impermissibility of political statements regardless of their form or the forum at which they are pronounced, be they addresses to the Moldovan leadership or to Moldova as a whole. As an Army commander, he must perform only his direct duties: To maintain the army in a state of readiness and do not permit provocations, especially as regards the seizure of equipment and arms.<sup>120</sup>

The president's reproach had little effect, and by March, the conflict escalated into organized assaults on three large Moldovan police units, and their headquarters, stationed in the southern Transdniestria. The Dniester Guards and the Cossacks attacked with BMP equipped infantry supported by tanks and rocket artillery in battalion sized formations clearly overmatching the lightly armed Moldovan Police detachments in the Transdniestria. Russian troops of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army assisted this action by blowing several highway bridges over the Dniester River, effectively severing the link to Moldova proper and any means Chisinau had of reinforcing its beleaguered police forces in the Transdniestria.<sup>121</sup>

The military involvement of the Cossacks, from the Don region of the Ukraine, triggered pitched diplomatic pleas from the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry to establish a cease-fire in the region. The Ukraine did not want the crisis to spread and did not support the mercenary actions of its citizens in the Transdniestria. Still not mobilized for war, Moldova began feeling the international pressure from the Ukraine to resolve the crisis quickly.<sup>122</sup>

In addition to the international pressures exerted on the Chisinau government, domestic demonstrations in the capital city escalated and called for immediate military action to crush the

Transdnister forces and reestablish control of the disputed territory. President Mircea Snegur, the Moldovan head of state, bore the brunt of the criticism for his nonaggressive stance towards the rogue state, but he continued to try his hand at resolving the situation diplomatically for the next several weeks. During middle March 1992, the Moldovan Government secured international support for their position in the Russian Parliament, the Ukrainian Parliament, and in Romania; this coupled with Moldovan Presidents propensity to compromise garnered a 17 March cease fire at the cost of granting economic and taxation autonomy for the Transdnister region. Although magnanimous, Tiraspol did not find the offer satisfactory and continued to demand its sovereignty. The opposing sides were again at an impasse. Pressure continued to increase in the intervening weeks of mid march as the Transdnister forces continued their offensive action against the Moldovan police forces, consolidated their gains, and prepared to thwart any Moldovan counteroffensive military action. Ill prepared for the larger scale conflict, it is unlikely that the Moldovan forces could have combated the Transdnister military effectively in March of 1992, the Transdnister forces were better organized, equipped, and supplied; the DRG easily overwhelmed any Moldovan resistance.<sup>123</sup>

The conflict's escalation to organized military action by the Tiraspol Army, the negative domestic public opinion in Moldova, and the international pressure for action triggered a shift in the Chisinau strategy from diplomatic and economic action to mainly military. On 28 March President Snegur, the Moldovan President, declared a state of emergency, imposed marshal law, and established direct presidential rule in the country. A diplomatic ultimatum, issued to the Tiraspol Government went unanswered and only a military option remained. By 31 March 1992, Snegur addressed the parliament and declared that the illegitimate forces must be disarmed by force and that the time for peaceful negotiations had past.<sup>124</sup>

Tensions increased in the days following the 28 March Statement, the Transdnierster government instituted another rail blockade, violence continued throughout the region, rocket attacks on Moldovan held positions escalated, and the death toll continued to rise. Refugees began displacing from the disputed region, the Slavic to the Ukraine and the Moldovan towards Romania. As the conflict appeared to grow in size and level of violence, the public support Russia had provided Moldova previously began to waver. Russian public statements, aggravated by the refugee movements and increased fighting, canted toward protecting the Russian speaking peoples in the region from violence. Security needs, it seems, devolved more along ethnic lines than previously espoused diplomatic statements would have supported. Accordingly, President Boris Yeltsin ordered the Russian troops in Transdnierster to protect the Russian people in the region and created a significant threat to Moldovan military action in the Transdnierster proper. The vagueness of using the term Russian people allowed for an interpretation that included the Cossacks and Dniester Guards. Russian support for Moldovan action remained important to Moldova for economic reasons as well, Russia provided their electricity and natural gas on credit, which led the Chisinau government to adopt a narrow strategy for the use of the military arm.<sup>125</sup>

In that the Transdnierster forces had crossed the Rubicon, a strong military strike remained the only alternative to full-scale invasion that would both satisfy Moldovan pride and quell some of the public unrest fired by inaction and not precipitate a military response by Russian troops. Bendery, the only town on the west bank of the Dniester River under Transdnierster control, it is adjacent to Tiraspol and connected by a bridge over the Dniester River, became the focal point for a Moldovan offensive action. On 1 April 1992, in response to an attack on a Moldovan Police station in Bendery, a full Brigade of the Moldovan army attacked the DRG forces executing the raid. Pitched fighting ensued as reinforcements from both sides entered the fray, casualties were mounting on both sides but the advantage seemed to be with the

Moldovan Army. Throughout the region raids, terrorist attacks and rocket attacks escalated to new levels of intensity. On the second day of fighting in Bendery the balance of power shifted in favor of the Transdniester forces when officers of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army threatened to cross the bridge from Transdniester in support of the DRG. With a substantial hold on the city and victory apparently assured, Moldovan troops, tankless, encountered a column of Russian tanks crossing the bridge. They destroyed the first three armored vehicles with antitank systems, but the Moldovans could not stay the assault. By the end of the fourth day of heavy combat, the troops from the opposing forces had divided the city in one half. Moldova retained the western portion and the Transdniester the east. The heaviest fighting of the war had occurred and resolved little except to steal the adversaries' will against further compromise; ethnic honor became the stake in a contest of arms and blood.<sup>126</sup>

Fighting continued throughout the Transdniester amongst small level units for the control of small pieces of real estate for the remainder of April. The Transdniester rail blockade sustained its embargo against Moldova and diplomacy was barely extant. A tentative cease-fire, brokered on 17 April, was short lived. About 340 casualties amassed between both sides during the two-week fight. The Transdniester forces prepared to regain any lost territory in early May as the Moldovans consolidated their position and lobbied for Russian neutrality.<sup>127</sup>

May of 1992 found the DRG and Cossacks improving their organization by acquiring additional mechanized equipment from the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, and they proceeded to launch surprise attacks on the Moldovan detachments in Transdniester, breaking the cease-fire. Diplomacy stayed immediate escalation of the conflict into all out war as Russia and Moldova brokered a yet another agreement focusing on a more permanent settlement of the dispute, and the withdrawal of the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army from the region. Tiraspol proposed autonomy for the Transdniester. Little progress had been made, and the situation remained volatile. Snegur continued to broker a

negotiated settlement and secured more concessions from the Moldovan Parliament in hopes of ending the bloodshed.<sup>128</sup>

Moldova's overtures toward peace were again stymied by Smirnov's actions. On 19 June 1992, Transdnister again launched a reinforced brigade sized attack on the town of Bendery and overwhelmed the defending Moldovan forces in the western portion of the city. Initiative, provided by armored formations and incognito 14<sup>th</sup> Army officers and troops, pushed the Moldovan forces into the suburbs. In desperation, the Moldovan Air Squadron, a few MIG-29's, bombed and destroyed the bridge between Bendery and Tiraspol, effectively isolating the Transdnister forces from reinforcing success. The battle lasted for three days; artillery fires razed the city and destroyed nearly every building and structure. Moldova had received over two hundred casualties and Transdnister forces suffered eight hundred in the fight.<sup>129</sup>

Aggression continued in the aftermath of the second battle of Bendery in spite of a negotiated cease-fire on 23 June 1992. The leaders of both governments failed to control the violence in the region in the aftermath of military action. Ethnic violence erupted like a volcano, every district surrounding and including the Transdnister proper witnessed anarchy, as the civil populace and debloused soldiers committed vengeful acts of violence against each other, ethnic Moldovans versus the Slavic peoples. The causality toll reached four thousand; the deadliest period yet in the conflict climaxed not through organized military action, but through civil lawlessness. Refugees increased proportionally to the violence in the region and by July, over one hundred thousand persons displaced from their homes. In attempted containment measures by both governments, nearly thirty thousand military troops, mainly mechanized for their own protection, mobilized, deployed, and flowed into the region to stem the tide of chaos. "For some time . . . a rationalistically oriented intelligentsia, particularly here in Moldavia [Moldovan and the Transdnister], has been controlling peoples minds. The peak turmoil came in 1992. Even

people with common sense were caught up in the nationalist [ethnic] wave. This should never have happened."<sup>130</sup> The upside of the escalation in violence was that both governments, including those external powers with an interest in containing the crisis, saw that their control of the crisis had devolved, and accordingly they became sincerely interested in a brokered armistice, albeit temporary.<sup>131</sup>

A logical first step had to be the separation of forces, but only after reaching a diplomatic agreement in principle. The key external governments with a stake in the conflict included Romania, Ukraine, and Russia. Moldova was the only combatant invited to the negotiation table, as Smirnov and the Transdnister, represented vicariously through Russia and Ukraine did not attend the formal talks. The venue for the special diplomatic session was the Conference of the Black Sea Countries, held in Istanbul on 25 July 1992. Snegur, representing Moldova at the conference, was at odds with his own parliament; he wanted more compromise, the granting of Transdnister as a separate political entity, and the parliament wanted a hard stance. Snegur and his allies for peace, the three other presidents, won a compromise with his Parliament. Although a separate territorial and politically independent status for Transdnister was not agreed to, the declaration of Bendery as a free city within Moldova, the reintroduction of the terms offered by Snegur in April of economic autonomy, and cultural self determination were allowed by the Moldovan Parliament. Additionally, the commanders of the military forces, the Moldovan Minister of Defense, the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army Commander, and the Dniester Guards Commander, would orchestrate the separation of forces.<sup>132</sup>

The fighting had become rare by the middle of July and the desire for a more formal resolution of the conflict had the full support of all concerned parties; the fear of violence and escalation loomed in the air. Refugees, tentatively returned to their homes, and went about the business of rebuilding their lives, lobbying for security, and stealing themselves for the worst.

The war had drained the meager resources of the Moldovan Government as delinquent electric, food, and fuel oil payments mounted. Thus, spurred to quick action by the circumstance of escalating, uncontrollable ethnic war, Snegur, Smirnov, and the Russian Presidents signed the Moscow Agreement on 21 July 1992, which articulated accepted terms of peace. The agreement is very similar to the Dayton Accords regarding the Bosnian peace, and may have served as its blueprint in many respects. It provided for: the withdrawal of forces from the Transdnier; the establishment of a demilitarized zone between the opposing parties and in the disputed territory, supervised by a joint peacekeeping force consisting of Moldovan, Transdnier and Russian members; a joint commission to administer security in the town of Bendery; the withdrawal of the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army from Transdnier; and continued adherence to the tenants agreed to at the Istanbul Conference on 25 June 1992. No specific established time for the accomplishment of the provisions addressed in the Moscow Agreement followed, leaving the prospect for permanence to the peace unsettled.<sup>133</sup>

### **The Consequences Of Peace**

The peace that ensued bears a striking lack of finality, much like the peace of the Korean War, an unending pause. An armistice does not serve to end war, but only halts the military action until a termination of the conflict causes occurs. With no established timeline, and motivation waning, several of the measures agreed upon during the Moscow Agreement talks had not occurred by spring of 2002. Nearly ten years later the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, still headquartered in the Transdnier, remains with its soldier residents.<sup>134</sup> The peacekeeping forces continue to patrol the disputed region with occasional acts of violence breaking the routine of the guard mount; they have an eerie sense of permanence in their duties. Demilitarization has taken the form of hiding and concealing the instruments of war from casual observance rather than disarmament, albeit a few public displays occasionally occur under the media camera.<sup>135</sup> Economic autonomy for the

Transdniester has moved forward with astonishing speed and development; organized criminals control the customs and trade policies in the region and arms sales to terrorists and rogue nations have given the criminal class of the Transdniester unprecedented wealth.<sup>136</sup> The economic juggernauts have become the political oligarchs and have secured political self-determination for the few; the people of the region aren't disentranced with their Slavic identity yet, war is a too recent memory, and far worse than being governed by a criminal class, after all the criminals are their own kind. Their ethnic identity is safe.<sup>137</sup>

Perhaps because greater concerns have taken precedence, Moldova itself has lived up to its end of the bargain for the most part. The economic plight of the region is dire. Taxes on imports cannot be collected and businesses located in the Transdniester do not pay taxes on goods smuggled across the porous border between the East and West bank.<sup>138</sup> The agrarian west is hopelessly in debt to Gaspron, the Russian energy and natural gas provider, and continues to accumulate notes at an astonishing rate. Without the ability to enforce levied taxes, the country's income is far below its debit rate. Heat and energy is essential to the population, and the Moldovan Government must pay the Russian energy monopoly any price it asks.<sup>139</sup> The industry on the east bank of the Dniester, only a kilometer away, is prosperous, but, lies beyond the influence of the tax collector. Income and the standard of living in Moldova have been on a decline and are near the bottom of the scale; petty crime is on the increase.<sup>140</sup> The conditions are such that in 2001 the communists supplanted the Democratic Party; it is the first former Soviet satellite to choose, or to be forced to, such a course. Surprisingly, in spite of all this, nationalism is still deeply rooted in the Moldovans; hope still exists.<sup>141</sup>

In efforts to avert crisis and solve their economic problems, the Moldovans have purchased an eight hundred meter stretch of land from the Romanians on the Danube River and are building a harbor.<sup>142</sup> They hope that with access to the Black Sea they can break the Russian

monopoly on energy and raw material imports. With money and an ability to import and export more freely, perhaps they feel the economic downward path may reverse. The second part of the recovery lies in solving the Transdniester issues of criminal activity and boarder customs control throughout the Transdniester.<sup>143</sup> This action may lead to crisis and conflict again, but no alternative may exist; the status quo is unacceptable.<sup>144</sup> Contrary to averting crisis the Moldovan government has continued on its language reform measures with new fervor; and the Transdniester authorities are taking counter measures.<sup>145</sup> The struggle continues.

### **Summary**

The unacceptable status of the situation begets possible solutions for the immediate future. To avoid violence from erupting at the level of the 1992 war, UN, NATO or other neutral peacekeepers must enforce the agreements; the concerned parties executing this mission thus far have been ineffective. Humanitarian assistance and economic development assistance must alleviate the poverty and concern for subsistence; the criminal class currently fulfills the humanitarian functions and must be displaced. The neutral forces must also ensure that disarmament of the Transdniester Military forces occurs. Democratic elections for the Transdniester region followed by the establishment of a local government administering the region must occur in order to dethrone the criminal element from power. Joint police forces must enforce the law and hold accountable those who violate it; they must not be easily corruptible. Privatization of the criminally run, Transdniester owned industries and plants, is necessary to break the criminal hold on the economy. The Moldovan nationalism campaign must not alienate the Slavic peoples, and create equal opportunity for the Transdniester Slavs.<sup>146</sup>

The solutions in the preceding paragraph seem self-evident. They are indeed the treatment for the symptoms of the conflict. However, remaining beneath the symptoms are the very viruses that caused the fever in the first place: the nationalist fervor, the language issue, the

identity crisis, the conflict between self-determination and inviolate boundaries, and ethnic mistrust. Now, added to the list are economic disaster, criminality and organized crime, and the memory of all those who have died in the last decade.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We must be patient—making peace is harder than making war.<sup>147</sup>

Adlai Stevenson, Speech to Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 21 March 1946, in  
Chicago Daily News 22 March 1946.

#### **Introduction**

This paper has examined the theory and nature of ethnic violence as it relates to strategy and the role of military forces, using the Transdnister War as a case study. Having conducted a historical analysis of Moldova, an examination of the theory of ethnic war, and an analysis of the ethnic violence in Moldova several findings have surfaced.

#### **Summary of Monograph Findings**

1. Ethnic war in Moldova, and in general, is a unique mixture of civil war, revolutionary war, or insurgency. It may manifest all of the characteristics of the three types of conflict or once, or more sequentially over the length of the conflict.
2. The moniker of ethnic war has utility to the militarist and strategist in determining an appropriate strategy that accounts for the three different types of conflict noted in finding number one.
3. The geography and history of a region and its peoples can indicate trends for ethno-nationalistic movements. The case of Moldova shows that since recorded history ethnic dominance of one group over another has been a routine rather than isolated phenomena in this part of the world.
4. The motivation for ethnic conflict is similar to the motivation for any other type of conflict: security of one's identity or security of a group's economic means.

5. Ethnic war in Moldova, and in general, illustrates a significant tension between two internationally recognized and accepted democratic principals. First, the right of a group of people to self-determine is a corner stone of democracy. The second is the inviolate nature of sovereign country borders. These two principles are at odds, and work towards generating conflict.

6. Ethnicity is closely allied to, mass movements in general, and nationalism. Ethnicity is more of a guideon than the motivation for ethnic conflict. This is important because the banner of ethnicity entirely changes the nature of a conflict, the fervor, dedication of the people involved, and the conduct of the nationalistic movement. Ethnicity makes the cause personal.

7. All the sources of national power were applied in the Transdniester War, and these sources of power are not reserved to internationally recognized nations.

8. The use of military forces in the Transdniester War was not decisive in resolving the crisis, were essential in preventing widespread anarchy from continuing once started, and necessary in asserting and enforcing governmental control.

9. Strategy is not solely a national issue. Accounting for the interests of other powerful and adjacent powers is essential in determining the feasibility of a strategic aim. The influence of Russia, Romania and the Ukraine, had significant impacts on the strategic direction of both Moldova and the Transdniester.

### **Answering the Thesis Question**

The Transdniester War and the ongoing ethnic conflict in Moldova indicate that military forces are limited in decisively resolving ethnic violence. The vague nature of the end state and objectives in an ethnic conflict make the determination of centers of gravity and decisive points problematic. Although limited in directly resolving the conflict, the use of military forces<sup>148</sup> is essential to preventing escalation of the crisis to long-term anarchy. Additionally, full spectrum

operations capability for military forces engaged in combating an ethnic conflict is essential. The movement from high to low intensity is sporadic and often unpredictable. In the Transdniester War the transition from full scale, armored warfare to peacekeeping did not allow for the introduction of new and varied force structures. The militaries of both sides, including the 14<sup>th</sup> Army had to perform all of the missions on the spectrum of conflict.<sup>149</sup>

### **Strategic Assessment Analysis**

The most important dynamic for both of parties involved in the conflict was the inability to accurately assess the strategic situation. First, the Chisinau government did not anticipate the escalation of the conflict to armed aggression by the Transdniester forces, and were militarily unprepared to respond quickly and with appropriate forces to secure their interests. Secondly, the influence and actions of the resident 14<sup>th</sup> Army in support of the Transdniester, was not expected, or they assumed that Russia would be able to control the actions of its army. Thirdly, Chisinau failed to appreciate the impact of their language decrees and the disenfranchising of the Slavic peoples within their borders.

The Tiraspol government had its own failures at assessment of the strategic situation. First, declaring a government independent does not make it so. Without an agreement with the Chisinau government authorizing succession, conflict was inevitable. The failure of Tiraspol in understanding the problems of gaining international recognition and a legal status in the international community made the state a rouge nation. The internationally illegal nature of succession also provided the unintended side effect of promoting organized crime and corruption.

**Ends**

Moldova: The ends for the Chisinau government was a westward looking Latin language based country. For Moldova the movement towards the West and a new nationalism was tied to developing economic independence for their country.

Transdniester: The ends for the Tiraspol government was an eastward looking Russian language based country. For Transdniester the movement towards the East and old Soviet nationalism was tied to retaining an existing economic status.

### **Means**

Ethno-national movements were the means both parties developed and used to achieve their desired ends. Both countries, to varying degrees, had available all of the sources of national power. These means were continually developed throughout the conflict internally, and through alliances with other nations. Some of the alliances were formal and others were informal, but the significance and impact of the agreements was not directly related to the formal nature of the alliance.

### **Ways**

#### **Political (Diplomatic)**

Chisinau used the political instrument of national power much more than the Tiraspol government. From conventions to cease-fire agreements to and treaties, a diplomatic solution to the crisis seemed most desirable to President Snegur and the Moldovan government. The Moldovan government, because of their internationally recognized status as a nation might have used the political instrument more frequently to garner support against the unrecognized Transdniester government.

The fact that formal use of the political instrument of power was not available to the Transdniester government severely limited its effectiveness in garnering official support from

other nations. The corrupted use of diplomacy, due to lack of recognition, limited the effectiveness of the political instrument of power for the Transdniester.

Moldova used the political instrument of power to greater advantage than the Transdniester.

### **Informational**

Both sides of the conflict used an informational instrument of power effectively. The Tiraspol government garnered external support from the Ukraine and Russia and effectively used information operations. The Transdniester government had the advantage of being the underdog in the conflict. They had less formal military forces, the 14<sup>th</sup> Army being a silent partner, than Moldova. The public view of the crisis clearly sided with the underdog. The Transdniester people were effectively viewed as the repressed minority rather than the aggressors in the conflict.

The Chisinau government's use of the informational instrument of power was more effective internally than externally. Popular support for a hard stance against the Transdniester never waned throughout the crisis. When the Chisinau Government was pursuing diplomacy instead of increased military action, during the spring of 1992, popular rallying for a harder military stance was at its height.

Both Moldova and Transdniester used the informational instrument of national power with equal effectiveness. The only difference is that Moldova used it primarily to maintain internal support and Transdniester used it primarily to gain external support.

### **Military**

At the outset of the crisis, both sides were poorly prepared for a military confrontation, and particularly for large scale armored brigade size engagements. Neither side acquired the forces and organization that they would have preferred before fighting escalated.

Moldova never used its military as the primary means of resolving the crisis. Nearly every engagement and operation was a reactionary measure taken to avert pending crisis and to appease the Moldovan nationalists. The lack of an offensive focus for the military could be attributed to the missing tanks (offensive capability) in their force structure or the desire to resolve the crisis diplomatically. Both are plausible and not exclusive.

The Transdnierster effectively used the guerilla forces of the Don Cossacks, and the alliance of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army throughout the conflict. The small Transdnierster military itself could not have countered the Moldovan forces without the assistance of these two allies. Initially, the Transdnierster forces secured the key police stations and depots before the Moldovan forces could react. This placed the Transdnierster primarily on the defensive for the remainder of the conflict. This defensive posture probably co-opted 14<sup>th</sup> Army support and tipped the scales in their favor.

Transdnierster used their military forces and alliances more efficiently and effectively than did the Moldovan forces. This is as much the result of the asymmetric application of the instruments of national power as military planning and execution. When Moldova was focusing on diplomacy, the Transdnierster used military forces as their focus. While the Moldovan forces were trying to regain their losses with a military focus the Transdnierster government focused on informational power and garnered the support of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army.

## **Economic**

The advantage in the economic arena is based on geography and lies with the Transdniester. The industrial base of the country and the adjacency of the Transdniester to the Ukraine and the commercial trade routes from Russia hindered Moldova economically.

Moldova's requirement to import nearly all of its energy sources, and a great deal of its consumer goods from the East, placed the Transdniester astride its economic lifeline. The taxes and customs on imports and exports could not be collected, free flow of trade could not be conducted, and control of the country's industrial base lay in territory occupied by Transdniester forces.

By doing nothing other than denying Moldovan governmental control of the Transdniester region the Tiraspol government economically damaged Moldova. By executing rail blockades, the Transdniester forces exasperated the Moldovan economic problem.

The economic instrument of power was almost solely a tool used by Transdniester against Moldova. Chisinau could do little to offset the negative economic situation caused by the conflict.

### **Full Spectrum Operations**

The doctrinal implications drawn from the Transdniester War for the use of the military instrument of national power in supporting a strategic aim are nested in the U.S. Army's doctrine of full spectrum operations: Offensive Operations, Defensive Operations, Stability Operations, and Support Operations. Analysis of the Transdniester War supports the doctrinal precept of the necessity for having military forces capable of conducting full spectrum operations.

### **Offensive Operations**

"Offensive operations aim at destroying or defeating an enemy. Their purpose is to impose US [national] will on the enemy and achieve decisive victory."<sup>150</sup>

The lack of offensive capability of both the Moldovan and Transdniester forces to conduct offensive operations against a defending enemy at the outset of the conflict was never resolved. The occupation of the East bank region by the Transdniester forces occurred against only lightly armed police forces. There was no organized defensive force of the Moldovan Army resident in the Transdniester at the outbreak of hostilities.

Once the occupation of Transdniester occurred the DRG forces established a defensive posture, and they were focused on retaining terrain rather than further offensive thrusts into West bank Moldova. The defending Transdniester forces routinely repulsed the offensive movements of the Moldovan forces. Moldova's military lacked the offensive capability of heavy armor to attack and seize key terrain. When Moldova did make progress offensively, it was quickly thwarted by small armor contingents of the counterattacking 14<sup>th</sup> Army.

### **Defensive Operations**

"Defensive operations defeat an enemy attack, buy time, economize forces, or develop conditions favorable for offensive operations. Defensive operations alone normally cannot achieve a decision. Their purpose is to create conditions for a counteroffensive that allows Army forces to regain the initiative."<sup>151</sup>

The use of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army as a counterattacking force, and as a source of supply for defensive munitions, allowed Transdniester to effectively defend their territory. Moldova also had adequate forces to defend their area, but there was no need. The Transdniester forces had already seized the territory on the East bank before Moldova established a defense.

The lack of military decision in the conflict supports the second part of the definition of defensive operations; defensive operations alone cannot achieve decision.

### **Stability Operations**

"Stability operations promote and protect US [national] national interests by influencing the threat, political, and informational dimensions of the operational environment through a combination of peacetime developmental, cooperative activities and coercive actions in response to crisis."<sup>152</sup>

Stability operations were ongoing throughout the offensive and defensive operations. The unpredictability of when violence would escalate caused a tension as the missions of the military forces varied from one extreme to another. The immediate and necessary deployment of a peacekeeping force after the 25 June 1992 cease-fire agreement left little time to restructure forces. The same forces, engaged only months before in high intensity conflict, transitioned to stability operations.

### **Support Operations**

"Support operations employ Army forces to assist civil authorities, foreign or domestic, as they prepare for or respond to crises and relieve suffering."<sup>153</sup>

Humanitarian missions and policing functions in the disputed region are currently being executed and supported by the peacekeeping forces established after the 25 June 1992 agreement. However, regular military forces executed the same functions throughout the conflict.

### **Shortfalls and Further Study**

Many of the findings of this monograph deserve a great deal more analysis in determining the doctrinal implications of employing military forces in combating ethnic violence. Recommended areas for further analysis and study are:

1. Evaluate the strategic assessment process and building campaign plans to deal with emerging ethno-national movements.
2. Fully analyze the impact of force structure modifications to support full spectrum operations in dealing with ethnic conflict.
3. Address the impact of superpower involvement in supporting sides in resolving ethno-national conflict.
4. Further analyze the impact of the democratic principle of self-determination versus international recognition of states and boundaries.
5. Analyze war termination for ethnic war in relation to end state and defining conditions of normalcy.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, three major lessons can be drawn from this study. First, ethnic violence should be analyzed and addressed as a nationalistic movement by a group that is threatened, is seeking its own identity, and that feels that their ability to self determine is essential. As Eric Hoffer, Michael Ignatieff, and Stuart Kaufmann have addressed in their books, the motivation for this movement is real and it is not ethnicity. Ethnicity is only the banner of the movement, not the cause of the movement.

Second, when determining strategy for combating ethnic violence, during the assessment phase, remember that all groups have all the elements of national power at their disposal to varying degrees. International law and international recognition have little bearing on the availability of the instruments of power at the disposal of a group. Also, closely related is the understanding that international laws and conventions have little influence on illegal or unrecognized groups and movements, and the actions of such groups.

Third, the ability of military forces to conduct full spectrum operations is essential to supporting national aims when dealing with ethnic conflict. The Transdniester War illustrated that preparedness was equal to full spectrum capabilities at the brigade level; asymmetry is a local tactical phenomena, and deploying forces to react to a crisis requires an ability to execute high intensity tactical assault if the enemy is prepared to defend.

The Transdniester War and ethnic violence in Moldova are not over. Only an armistice exists to separate forces and prevent a rupture of the temporary peace. Ethnic violence seems routine in the twenty-first century and no new method of resolving ethnic disputes has arisen in the information age.

How nations mitigate the loss of identity among minority groups in the future will possibly dictate the pace and intensity of ethnic conflicts. The strategy adopted by a majority to increase or sustain their identity in an ever-changing world will probably spark unrest among the minority groups with which they share a common border or economic market. Unless a strategy that provides for a large measure of equity and self-determination authority, for the minority group or less powerful group, is adopted, ethnic unrest and violence is likely to continue.

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