

The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later

Eugen Străuțiu, Steven D. Roper, William E. Crowther, Dareg Zabarah-Chulak, Victor Juc, and Robert E. Hamilton (eds.), *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., New York, USA, 2023, p. 251.

The book “*The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*”, edited by Eugen Străuțiu, Steven D. Roper, William E. Crowther, Dareg Zabarah-Chulak, Victor Juc, and Robert E. Hamilton, consists of nine logically connected papers that reconstruct and interpret the causes, essence, and consequences of the war of the Dniester over a time distance of three decades. Authors from diverse scientific disciplines, including international law, history, geopolitics, strategic studies, security studies, and economic analysis, collectively strive to address a common question: why does the path to a political resolution for this conflict remain elusive? Once researched only in the context of the frozen conflict, the Dniester conflict returned to the focus of research efforts after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2014. This book stands as a remarkable illustration of impartial research. It diligently explores substantial historical and current data while also introducing fresh interpretive frameworks. Through these efforts, it offers a holistic comprehension of the dynamics at play in modern conflicts.¹

The first paper in this book, “*The 1992 Dniester Armed Conflict: An Analytical Approach to the Politico-Military Events from the Perspective of the Involved Parties*,” written by Mihai Melintei, proposes an analytical study of the armed conflict in the Dniester since 1992 using Galtung’s triangle method. The author presents the utilisation of Galtung’s method, which offers an objective analysis and a factual, chronological reconstruction of various stages in political and military confrontations. Galtung’s triangle, composed of the context of contradictions, the attitudes and relationships

¹ Eugen Străuțiu, Steven D. Roper, William E. Crowther, Dareg Zabarah-Chulak, Victor Juc, and Robert E. Hamilton (eds.), *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, Peter Lang Publishing Inc., New York, USA, 2023, 1-20.

of the involved parties, and the behaviour of the conflicting parties, furnishes a comprehensive and unbiased depiction of the armed conflict in the Dniester region. The book chapter emphasises the role of Soviet nomenclature forces as a catalyst for the division between the two banks of the Dniester and the involvement of third parties, both from a military and political-diplomatic standpoint.²

In the second paper, “*Support for Moldova’s Territorial Integrity in the Transnistrian Region from 1989 to 1992*”, Keith Harrington examines individuals within the Transnistrian region who advocated for Moldova’s territorial integrity. Additionally, the paper explores the government reforms initiated in Chisinau during that period. Local opposition groups openly endorsed the controversial 1989 language laws, displayed the Tricolour flag (which separatists pejoratively labelled a “fascist symbol”), and boycotted separatist elections and referendums. The analysed archival documents reveal that the separatist authorities harboured serious concerns about these pro-Moldovan individuals and that their attempts to suppress these people violently contributed directly to the intensification of hostilities. The author concludes that the violent suppression of these pro-Moldovan actors’ activities directly contributed to the escalating violence that unfolded from the late 1990s onwards.³

In the third paper, “*Armed Stage in the Moldovan-Pridnestrovian Conflict: Causes and Political Consequences*,” Anatoliy Dirunthe presents a thorough examination of the domestic political factors that influenced the Moldovan leadership’s decision to employ their armed forces in the conflict with Pridnestrovie. The research is guided by two pivotal questions: How likely was the scenario of deploying the Moldovan army in the conflict with Pridnestrovie? What level of confidence did the Moldovan leadership have in the non-interference of the Russian Federation and its armed forces in this conflict? The author’s conclusion highlights the transformative impact of the Moldovan military’s defeat, which rendered the armed approach untenable for resolving the conflict. This shift in the socio-political landscape necessitated the inclusion of the Pridnestrovian side as an official participant in the negotiation process.⁴

“*Fighting for What and Whom? The Non-Resident Volunteers During the Armed Conflict in Pridnestrovie*” is the title of the fourth paper written by

² Mihai Melintei, “The 1992 Dniester Armed Conflict: An Analytical Approach to the Politico-Military Events from the Perspective of the Involved Parties,” in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 21-40..

³ Keith Harrington, “Support for Moldova’s Territorial Integrity in the Transnistrian Region from 1989 to 1992”, in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 41-68.

⁴ Anatoliy Dirunthe, “Armed Stage in the Moldovan-Pridnestrovian Conflict: Causes and Political Consequences,” in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 69-88.

Dareg Zabarah-Chulakthat, which delves into the motivations and organisational structures of non-resident fighters in Pridnestrovie. Using specific examples involving prominent individuals or organisations, it seeks to map out their networks, delve into their ideological stances, and explore their connections with political supporters in their home countries and the separatist leadership. This analysis is placed within a broader political context to comprehend the paradoxical support these non-resident fighters received from their home countries' political forces. It delves into the degree of official and unofficial backing the conflict parties received from Romania, Ukraine, and Russia. The author highlights how the ideological vacuum created by the disintegration of parts of the Soviet worldview was rapidly filled with substitute ideologies within the framework of Soviet perspectives on nationhood and statehood. It is worth noting that some of these organisations established robust and enduring networks that persist to this day.⁵

In the fifth paper, *“War Memorials Published in Chisinau: Between Documentary Value and Patriotic Manifesto”*, Nicoleta Annemarie Munteanu emphasises the lack of a systematic investigation of the memorials of the Dniester War printed in Chisinau. The initial books published immediately after the cessation of military operations primarily conveyed patriotic messages and featured a strong mobilisation theme, distinguishing them from later publications. The frequency of memorial works gradually decreased over the years, correlating with the diminishing creative capacity of the participants involved in the events and their natural passage. Through this research, the author established that the selective nature of traumatic memory has the potential to perpetuate recurring memories across generations, making them susceptible to manipulation and misuse. In the context of the Dniester War, this analysis reveals a distinct characteristic concerning memorials. It is marked by the crystallisation of communities on both banks with competing memories, giving rise to the formation of political mythologies and the cultivation of stereotyped attitudes.⁶

The sixth paper in this book, *The Russian Federation's Approach to the Unresolved Dniester Conflict and Its Implications for the Security and Foreign Policy of the Republic of Moldova*, written by Ana Jović-Lazić, delves into Russia's role in the Dniester conflict by emphasising their near-abroad policy, security interests, and approach to other unresolved conflicts in

⁵ Dareg Zabarah-Chulakthat, “Fighting for What and Whom? The Non-Resident Volunteers During the Armed Conflict in Pridnestrovie”, in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 89-113.

⁶ Nicoleta Annemarie Munteanu, “War Memorials Published in Chisinau: Between Documentary Value and Patriotic Manifesto”, in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 115-141.

post-Soviet space. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis that delves into the intricacies of Russia's engagement with the Dniester region both prior to and following the Ukrainian crisis. This analysis is approached through the lens of examining the identity of major powers and their strategic geopolitical interests in the region, and it is noticed that Russia has consistently adopted a distinct approach when dealing with post-Soviet nations in its "Near Abroad". This study underscores Moscow's view of the post-Soviet space as a crucial area for its national security as it seeks to both maintain and expand its influence. Russia's role in unresolved regional conflicts primarily serves to mitigate the influence of other geopolitical actors. The author concluded that given the deteriorating relations between Russia and Western powers, it is reasonable to speculate that even in what seems to be a relatively stable security situation, there exists the potential for heightened tensions or the emergence of a new conflict that could have direct repercussions across the broader region.⁷

Maximilian Ohle, the author of the seventh paper, "*Moldova and Transnistria's Bargaining Strategies Towards Russia: Deciphering Bargaining Codes in Asymmetric Relationships*," introduces the concept of bargaining codes within asymmetric arrangements to redirect the discussion towards how Russia, Moldova, and Transnistria engage in negotiations regarding their respective preferences for settling the territorial dispute. It examines how their stated intentions align with their bargaining practices and actions during the negotiation process. By looking at the behavioural patterns and bargaining strategies of Moscow, Chisinau, and Tiraspol, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions under which they navigate each other's intentions and actively work to achieve the most advantageous bargaining outcomes, even if it comes at the expense of the others under specific circumstances. Although successful bargaining typically relies on the assumption of shared interests within a favourable range of potential outcomes, the Russian-Moldovan-Transnistrian triangular relationship demonstrates that the negotiated agreements were fundamentally incompatible throughout all stages of bargaining. In this manner, the author introduced a novel and innovative approach that provided a more insightful understanding than conventional conceptual debates.⁸

The eighth paper, "*Russian Involvement in the Transnistrian War: A Prototype of Russian Modern 'Hybrid Warfare'?*", which is written by Tarik

⁷ Ana Jović-Lazić, The Russian Federation's Approach to the Unresolved Dniester Conflict and Its Implications for the Security and Foreign Policy of the Republic of Moldova, in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 143-167.

⁸ Maximilian Ohle, "Moldova and Transnistria's Bargaining Strategies Towards Russia: Deciphering Bargaining Codes in Asymmetric Relationships," in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 169-193.

Solmaz, provides a comprehensive response to whether “hybrid warfare” constitutes a new form of warfare. It does so by conducting two case studies: the covert Russian intervention in Ukraine from February 2014 to February 2022 and the Soviet/Russian involvement in the 1990-92 Transnistria War. This article also argues that it is crucial to understand the circumstances under which Russia is inclined to employ “hybrid warfare” methods since Russia does not exclusively rely on these methods in all its operations. The author concludes that there are at least four different situations in which Russia resorts to using “hybrid warfare”: when it perceives the interests at stake as “important” but not necessarily “survival” or “vital”; when it needs to maintain plausible deniability; when it is not fully prepared for a large-scale military intervention; and when the operational environment lends itself to the use of indirect methods of attack. While this study may not provide definitive conclusions, it is an exceptional exploratory research design, primarily used to clarify concepts, identify variables, and generate hypotheses that can be tested in future research.⁹

The last, ninth paper in this book, written by Kamala Valiyeva, “*Revisiting Moldova’s Transnistria Dispute Amid Severing EU-Russia Ties*”, offers a comprehensive examination of Moldova’s Transnistria dilemma, with a specific emphasis on the internationalisation of the conflict within the context of heightened competition over post-Soviet Eastern Europe. The author delves into the current impasse in resolving the territorial dispute, highlighting the growing misalignment of interests among major geopolitical actors. The ongoing geopolitical power struggle among these significant players has unfortunate repercussions for countries caught in the middle, such as Moldova. It is crucial to note that the EU and Russia hold conflicting visions of the European security order and distinct approaches to integration in the shared neighbourhood. These differences in vision and strategy substantially impact the situation in and around Transnistria. Moreover, the absence of a mutually agreed-upon regional security framework remains unresolved, contributing to heightened insecurity. This situation has led to a significant East-West confrontation, with Western countries severing their ties with Russia, further complicating the scenario.¹⁰

The book “*The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*” presents an original approach to the Dniester conflict by impartially analysing existing data and situating this information within a contemporary security and geopolitical context. The distinct value of this

⁹ Tarik Solmaz, “Russian Involvement in the Transnistrian War: A Prototype of Russian Modern ‘Hybrid Warfare’?”, in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 195-213.

¹⁰ Kamala Valiyeva, “Revisiting Moldova’s Transnistria Dispute Amid Severing EU-Russia Ties”, in: *The Armed Conflict of the Dniester: Three Decades Later*, op. cit. 215-243.

book is its innovative approach to analysing pertinent information, which is presented in a clear and accessible manner. This approach enhances the understanding of the subject matter and facilitates the verification of the research itself. As a result, the book merits attention within the scope of researching this particular conflict and understanding broader modern security phenomena.

This book also provides an interdisciplinary presentation of research findings from renowned scholars. This makes it an excellent foundation for future research in this field, providing a comprehensive and accessible resource for scholars and researchers to build upon.

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