

## **Transforming the Russian-led peacekeeping force in Moldova into a Multinational Force and Civilian Observers**

November 6, 2006

### **Abstract**

The current Russia-dominated peacekeeping format in the Republic of Moldova is an inefficient structure. In conjunction with the troops of the former 14<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, it acts as a shield for the leadership of the self-styled Moldavian Transnistrian Republic to consolidate its authoritarian regime, preserving its *status quo*. Furthermore, the huge amount of ammunition stockpiled in the Transnistrian region of Moldova is a real threat to the stability and security of the entire region. The withdrawal of Russian forces from the Tiraspol-ruled districts of Moldova is an international obligation of Russia under the 1999 OSCE and CFE Summits.

In addition, Russia's military presence in the region in the absence of a peacekeeping mandate constitutes a violation of internationally recognized peacekeeping principles and of Moldova's Constitution.

Along with democratic change in the Transnistrian districts of Moldova, the transformation of the current Russia-dominated peacekeeping format into a multinational format will play a significant role in resolving the conflict in such a way that the Nistru's east-bank region of Moldova becomes unified with the rest of the country's territory.

As a model for a post-conflict multinational force in Moldova we propose the Sinai Peninsula's Multinational Force and Observers, established on August 3rd 1981. With this model, a Multinational Force and Civilian Observers in Moldova (MFCOM) would be created on the basis of a multilateral agreement signed by the relevant parties, thus forming an independent multinational body with a mechanism of military and civil observers. The parties of the agreement are proposed to be the countries and their supranational bodies (EU) that are part of the current Transnistrian conflict negotiation format: Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, the U.S., and the EU. The Tiraspol regime and OSCE will not be part of the multinational agreement. The parties shall agree from which nations the MFCOM will be drawn. In the case of the United States, the North Carolina National Guard is proposed to provide a military contingent. Moldova and North Carolina have special multi-dimensional partnership relations.

The Multinational Force and Civilian Observers in Moldova will have its main headquarters in Chisinau, where it will be headed by a Director-General, a civilian appointee who would be elected by a majority of votes of the agreement's parties for a period of three or four years. In addition, MFCOM will have a Force Commander responsible for the military aspects of the MFCOM. The number of military units will be negotiated by the parties and specified in the multinational agreement.

The main risk of implementing this proposal is Russia's opposition to the exclusion of the Transnistrian regime and OSCE as parties of the proposed agreement. The West (especially the

U.S. and EU) would need to have some active, sophisticated diplomacy to counter Russian opposition.

### **Background information**

*The formation and present state of the peacekeeping forces in Moldova.* Although officially neutral, the Russian 14th Army (stationed in the Transnistrian area of Moldova) played a vital role in the conflict between the government of Moldova and its breakaway region of Transnistria. From 1990 to 1992, the 14<sup>th</sup> Army's commanders permitted the transfer of personnel from their base and weapons from their stockpiles in Moldova to the Transnistrian militia and volunteered services of Cossack forces that entered the region once fighting broke out (there were approximately 1,000 Cossack troops in the Nistru east-bank region of Moldova in 1994<sup>1</sup> who came from Russia and Ukraine). Furthermore, strong indications suggested that elements of the 14th Army actively intervened on the side of the separatists during the fighting in 1992, using their heavy weapons to turn the tide in the fighting<sup>2</sup> against the poorly armed and newly formed Moldovan army.

The July 1992 bilateral cease-fire agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova<sup>3</sup>, under the auspices of Moldovan President Mircea Snegur and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, established a tripartite peacekeeping force comprised of Russian, Moldovan, and Transnistrian units.<sup>4</sup> This force is stationed within the security zone, a buffer zone along the Nistru River, which separates the areas governed by the Republic of Moldova from the Transnistrian regime-controlled region, except for isolated pockets of territory (see the attached map). By fall of 1994, Russia had a 650-strong contingent within the three-party peacekeeping force<sup>5</sup>. In addition to this, on August 3, 1992, a group of 30 military observers was created (10 from each party involved in conflict –Russia, Moldova and the breakaway Transnistrian region) In November 1998, 10 Ukrainian observers joined the group<sup>6</sup>.

Russian-enforced peacekeeping differs considerably from classical UN (international) peacekeeping. Not only does it lack the mandate of an international organization, but also none of the three peacekeeping parties are impartial, since all were participants in the conflict. Indeed, the arrangement in Moldova reflects Russia's interest of controlling the countries of the former

---

<sup>1</sup> Helen Fedor. Belarus and Moldova: country studies. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Ruling of the legal case "Ilascu and others versus Russia and Moldova." The European Court of Human Rights. Strasbourg. 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Convention regarding the principles of a peaceful resolution of the armed conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. July 21, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Initially, Russia and Moldova decided to form peacekeeping forces from units from Belarus, Ukraine, Russia and Moldova. However, this did not materialize due to Belarus's and Ukraine's refusal to participate. The new Russian proposal called for the introduction of combined "interested" peacekeeping forces (5 Russian, 3 Moldovan and 2 Transnistrian battalions).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Yermolaev. Russia's International Peacekeeping and Conflict Management in the Post-Soviet Environment. Center for International Security and Conflict Management Studies (CISCMS), Moscow, Russia. Published in Monograph No 44: Boundaries of Peace Support Operations, February 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Mihai Gribincea. The Russian Policy on Military Bases: Georgia And Moldova. 2001. Pp. 198-217.

Soviet Union under false claims of a "special role and responsibility" to maintain "stability" on that territory<sup>7</sup>.

In March 2003, the EU began to look at Moldova to test its emergent peace-support capabilities, as part of the European Security and Defense Policy. The Paris-based Institute for Security Studies offered an ambitious plan for direct EU-Russia cooperation on European security affairs<sup>8</sup>. The proposal envisioned that Moldova could become a test ground for EU-Russia cooperation on peacekeeping. Some elements of this plan were viewed by experts as indicative of EU interest in bypassing the U.S. Despite mutual U.S. and EU engagement in the Transnistrian settlement talks in 2005, the proposal was not formally put forward by the EU.

In the last two to three years, the government of Moldova repeatedly asked for the "internationalization" of the peacekeeping force in Moldova, being unsatisfied with the current peacekeeping format. The Moldovan government sees the current format as an impotent structure, at least, and, in conjunction with the troops of the former 14<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, as a shield for the leadership of the self-styled Moldavian Transnistrian Republic to consolidate its authoritarian regime and a de-facto independence of the region, and preserve its *status quo*, at most.

***The presence of Russian military forces in Moldova.*** Western countries and Moldova consider the Russian military presence, including the huge amount of ammunition stockpiled in the Transnistrian region of Moldova, to be a real threat to the stability and security of the entire region, as well as a serious obstacle in the process of resolving the Transnistrian conflict. According to Russian data, the quantity of munitions in the stocks of the Operational Group of Russian Forces (the new name for the former 14<sup>th</sup> Army) located in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova amounted to about half of the 42,000 tons that existed there in 1994. In mid-1995, approximately 4,000 to 6,000 Russian troops were present in the Transnistrian sector of Moldova and in 2006 there are approximately 1,400 troops.

Moldova tried to negotiate the withdrawal of the Russian forces on a bilateral basis. In 1994, Moldova and Russia signed a Withdrawal Agreement that was not, however, ratified by Russia. Moreover, the Russian side and the Transnistrian leadership devised a new interpretation of the Agreement, making its ratification dependent on the "synchronization" of the withdrawal with the political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, which was contrary to the letter of the Agreement. The refusal of Russia to ratify the agreement, as well as its outdated provisions and interpretations, caused Moldova to seek an international solution to this problem.

The withdrawal of Russian forces from the Tiraspol-ruled districts of Moldova became an international obligation of Russia when in November 1999, at the OSCE and CFE Summits, Russia undertook two international obligations regarding the withdrawal of its forces. Through cross-references in both OSCE and CFE Summit documents, Russia undertakes the responsibility for a complete withdrawal of all its forces from Moldova, including non-CFE personnel. The ratification of the adapted CFE Treaty that is in Russia's interest becomes

---

<sup>7</sup> The Strange Case of Russian Peacekeeping Operations in the Near Abroad 1992-1994. MAJ Raymond C. Finch, III, U.S. Army, Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS. July 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Dov Lynch. Russia Faces Europe. ISS, May 2003.

dependent on its withdrawal from Moldova and Georgia. According to these documents, Russia undertook an obligation to withdraw its forces from Moldova<sup>9</sup> by the end of 2001. In 2003, Russia failed to meet its second one-year extension from the original withdrawal date. The U.S. and its allies should further condition the ratification of the 1999 Adapted Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe upon completion of Russia's international obligations regarding Georgia and Moldova.

### **Timing for change**

Russia's military presence in the region in the absence of a peacekeeping mandate constitutes a violation of internationally recognized peacekeeping principles, of peacekeeping principles under the Russian Federation's legislation, and of Moldova's Constitution. It also represents a major obstacle to ending the conflict<sup>10</sup>.

The current peacekeeping operation is one of the key elements and reasons behind inefficient conflict resolution in Moldova. The international community already has recognized the need for change. Importantly, one party of the conflict, the host country – the Republic of Moldova – has numerous times and at the highest level stated that it is against sustaining the current peacekeeping format, and asked for its replacement with an international peacekeeping force in accordance with recognized international standards.

Along with democratic change in the Nistru's east-bank region of Moldova, the transformation of the current Russia-dominated format into a multinational format will play a significant role in resolving the conflict in such a way that the Tiraspol-ruled districts of Moldova become unified with the rest of the territory of Moldova.

The West should be the main promoter of this concept, and U.S. leadership is essential to assure that the proposal is not fudged, delayed, and neglected.

### **What is proposed?**

***International precedent.*** As a model for a post-conflict multinational force in Moldova, we propose the Sinai Peninsula's Multinational Force and Observers, established on August 3rd 1981 by the Protocol to the Treaty of Peace<sup>11</sup>. The reason the MFO suits Moldova lies in the MFO's unique status of not being under an international umbrella (i.e. the UN or the OSCE, where Russia has a veto-power), nor under an EU-Russia arrangement where the U.S. could be excluded. The MFO assumed its mandate on April 25th 1982, the day that Israel handed over sovereignty of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt<sup>12</sup>. In 1995, the United States experimented with a composite battalion consisting of National Guard soldiers from Virginia and Maryland, and Regular Army soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division (Air

---

<sup>9</sup> As well as from Georgia.

<sup>10</sup> Transdnistria: Pro-Western Regimes Work Toward Russian Withdrawal. Stratfor Global Intelligence Brief. June 14, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> The Multinational Force & Observers official website [www.mfo.org](http://www.mfo.org).

<sup>12</sup> Egypt, Israel and the United States negotiated the deal to set up a peacekeeping organization outside the framework of the UN.

Assault). Since January 2002, the United States has been supplying National Guard Infantry battalions exclusively.

**Mandate.** The Multinational Force and Civilian Observers in Moldova (MFCOM) would be created on the basis of a multilateral agreement signed by the relevant parties. The MFCOM would be an independent multinational body, an international mechanism of military and civil observers, financed and provided with military contingents by the parties. As result, the 1992 Moldovan-Russian agreement would lose its force. In addition, Moldova could be encouraged to denounce the agreement unilaterally.

The MFCOM will exercise monitoring and inspection over the military forces, munitions depots currently under the control of the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation, including of the Tiraspol-controlled military and paramilitary formations. The mission of the MFCOM will prevent any military escalation and will monitor the disarmament of the Transnistrian forces and/or their integration into the unified Moldovan Armed Forces, as well as transportation of Russian military arsenal and troops out of Moldova.

**Parties.** The parties would be the countries or their supranational bodies (in the case of the EU) that are part of the current Transnistrian conflict negotiation format, including observers: Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, the U.S., and the EU. By using this selection criterion, the breakaway political entity is excluded from being part of the multinational agreement, since under international law the Nistru's east-bank region of Moldova is not a legal entity, nor is it recognized by any country. The OSCE also is not suitable to become a signatory party, since it is not a legal entity and it is not able to sign treaties. The parties shall agree from which nations the MFCOM will be drawn, including but not limited to Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, the U.S. and member-states of the European Union. In the case of the United States, the North Carolina National Guard is proposed to provide a military contingent. Moldova and North Carolina have special multi-dimensional partnership relations derived from and operating under the U.S. National Guard State Partnership program<sup>13</sup>.

**Organization.** The Multinational Force and Civilian Observers in Moldova will have its main headquarters in Chisinau, where it will be headed by a Director-General, who will be a civilian appointee. The Director-General must be from a country that is party of the MFCOM agreement and, in the case of the EU, from a member country of the European supranational entity. He or she would be elected by a majority of votes of the agreement's parties, for a period of three or four years; the affirmative vote of the host country, Moldova, would be mandatory. In addition, MFCOM will have a Force Commander responsible for the military aspects of the MFCOM. The Force Commander will be selected by using the same criteria as the Director-General. The Force Commander could not be from the same country as the Director-General simultaneously. The

---

<sup>13</sup> Managed by the North Carolina National Guard, the relationship between Moldova and North Carolina has flourished since 1995 as part of a "State Partnership program". The program fosters cooperation and aid in the areas of education, health care and other humanitarian fields, culture, agriculture and military issues. In 1999, North Carolina and Moldova signed a Memorandum of Intent, and each formed a committee made up of academic, government and civic leaders. The two committees form a Bilateral Affairs Committee, which discusses ways in which North Carolina and Moldova can work together to promote cooperation.

number of military units will be negotiated by the parties and specified in the multinational agreement. *See the attached organization chart.*

The Director-General would exercise his authority through his staff at the Headquarters in Chisinau, and the Force Commander and his staff would also be headquartered in Chisinau. The MFCOM troops will be located on the territory of Moldova mainly on the east bank of the Nistru, as well as in those localities on the west bank that currently are under the control of the Tiraspol regime, i.e. the city of Tighina/Bender (see the attached map).

***Number of troops and civilian observers.*** Parties will determine the initial number of troops and civilian observers and their proportion to the overall number. The share of troops from an individual country will be proportional to the number of parties. For example, if there are five parties, a party will supply not more than 20 percent of troops and/or civilian observers. The Director-General and the Force Commander will periodically propose any changes in the total number of the MFCOM and the change of proportion based on the needs and situation on the ground, with the tendency to increase the number of civilians and diminish the number of troops.

## **Risks**

It is expected that Russia would vehemently oppose having the Tiraspol authorities excluded as a party of the proposed agreement, thus losing a 'vote.' In order to avoid a further stalemate in conflict resolution, it should be the top priority of the West (especially the U.S.) to counter Russian opposition. The above obstacle could be overcome by the U.S. in close cooperation with the European Union, Ukraine and Moldova, singling out Russia as the only party opposing to the settlement. The U.S. could work with Moldova, encouraging the host country to use all its sovereign rights to demand the change of the format by using available channels within international organizations where Russia is a member, as well as bilaterally with Russia in close consultation with the West.

Other risks could involve the possible reluctance of the OSCE to step out from the proposed multinational agreement, but this should not be an insurmountable obstacle for the West.

Besides, if such an approach proposed in this paper is not urgently pursued, the Kremlin and Tiraspol will use the Kosovo as a pretext to delay the solution for the Transnistrian conflict.

# MFCOM Organization



