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Is Moldova Next for Putin's Russia?

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Andrew R. Thomas
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Premises:

- Despite many peace overtures and hollow ceasefires, the conflict in Ukraine is escalating.
- Many experts are wondering what Russia might be planning next.
- The possible addition of American military aid to the equation might inexorably alter the situation

Context:

Moldova is one of those countries in Europe few people can identify on a map and even fewer know anything about. Yet, Moldova sits right smack in the middle of the world's biggest potential flashpoint: a direct conflict between Russia and NATO. The current territory of Moldova was part of Romania from 1918 to 1940. During World War II, Moldova was annexed by the Soviet Union. Moldova remained under Soviet control until its independence in 1991.

However, even after gaining independence, several thousand Russian troops did not completely depart. At present, two thousand Russian soldiers occupy a sliver of land between the Dniester River and the eastern Moldovan border with Ukraine known as Transnistria.

Today, about 75% of the Moldova's total population of nearly 4 million are of Romanian ethnic origin and speak Romanian. Russians make up about 6% percent of the population. Of the 500,000 people who live in independent Transnistria around 140,000 are Russian.

Romania has been a NATO member since 2004 and a fully integrated nation into the European Union since 2007. In June of last year, Moldova signed a far-reaching association agreement with the EU and also secured visa-free travel to the Union. The government in Chisinau (Moldova's capital) did this despite complaints, warnings, and the imposition of an embargo on its wine and food by Russia.

Prognostication:

- While chances of Moldova becoming a full-fledged member of the EU remain years away, the country's tilt away from Moscow is raising concerns.
- Similar moves by Ukraine towards the EU were ultimately met with Russian military force.
- It is plausible that Russia might seek to launch a mission to move through Ukraine and link up with its troops in Transnistria.

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About the Author

Andrew R. Thomas, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Marketing and International Business at the University of Akron and a *New York Times* bestselling author, co-author, or editor of 18 books.

His most recent work is ***Romania and Moldova at the Crossroads: Geopolitics, Development, and National Security*** (New York; Springer 2014). See: http://www.amazon.com/Andrew-R.-Thomas/e/B001IYZIFE/ref=sr_tc_2_0?qid=1424012120&sr=1-2-ent

Dr. Thomas is the founding editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Transportation Security*, contributing editor at *Industry Week*, and a regularly featured analyst for media outlets around the world such as BBC, CNBC, Fox News, CNN, and ABC.

He is also a founding member of the National Academy of Sciences, Transportation Research Board, Supply Chain Security Subcommittee.