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Estandart Reyau d'a Cheneralísma, prencipal bandera carlista d'a primera guerra bordada por María Francisca de Braganza em 1833 Royal Standard of the General in Chief, main Carlist flag of the First War embroidered by Maria Francisca de Braganza in 1833). Wikimedia Commons

Milyutin's response to the Central Asia question.

The geo-strategy of the Russian War Minister for annexing Turkistan.

by GIORGIO SCOTONI

ABSTRACT. A Brilliant commander and War Minister of the Tsarist Empire, Count Dmitry A. Milyutin linked geography with the “art of war” studies establishing the so-called Military Statistics as an independent science. According to Milyutin its subject was “the general and singular regularities of the development of the state”, namely physical features, territory, political system, economy, and military power. Branded “geo-strategy” the new discipline laid the theoretical foundations for the tsarist geopolitics in the era of Alexander II. Geo-strategic doctrine identified the British Empire to be Russia's main adversary and inspired tsarist territorial expansion in Central Asia. Firstly, this paper examines the theoretical framework shaped by Milyutin. Secondly, its analysis of the implementation of wide-ranging annexation plans which culminated in the conquest of Turkistan (1864-1873) will follow. The key question that this paper investigates is assessing the extent to which the geo-strategic formula was used successfully.

KEYWORDS: MILYUTIN, GEOPOLITICS, BIG GAME, KHANATES, RUSSIAN EMPIRE, CENTRAL ASIA

In the mid-nineteenth century tsarist expansionism relied upon the idea of empire and linked the struggle for space with territorial dogma, advocating for a deterministic relation between geographical and historical development of the Russian state.

Field Marshal-General and War Minister from 1861 to 1881 Dmitrij A. Milyutin (1816-1912) posed the question of modernising the tools of statecraft stressing the urgency of an innovative approach. He was rediscovered by post-Soviet scholarly as an author of landmark works of military history¹, today he is cel-

1 Milyutin, D.A.: “Istorija vojny Rossii s Franziej v zarstvovanie Imperatora Pavla I v 1799 g.” (*History of Russia's War with France during the reign of Emperor Paul I in 1799*) 1852-53; 5 voll-

brated as the developer of the Army's great reform and the main geopolitical thinker of his time.²

Geo-strategic theory

Milyutin was not only a professional theorist of the “art of war”, but also a key intellectual which gave new meanings and significance to tsarist geopolitics. As an influential member of the Statistical department of the “Russian Geographical Society”³ an independent branch of military geography that he dubbed “Military Statistics”⁴. Alternatively branded “Geo-Strategy”, the new discipline was rooted in Achenwall's school of Political Sciences⁵ and embraced the entire process of statecraft. According to Milyutin “one needs to widen considerably the field of research for a critical assessment of war theatres or of entire states in strategic terms”⁶. So, military statistics studied the physical and demographic features as well as the socio-economic development and the political peculiarities of the nations.

In 1847 Milyutin published “First experiences of military statistics”, the work he is most remembered for. The study exposes in the first part the geo-strategic theory and in the second its practical applications. It begins by assessing the attempts to give geography and statistics the status of sciences on their own. Then,

- 2 “Voenno-geograficheskoe vozzrenija D.A. Milyutina i geopoliticheskie prioritety Rossii v sovremennykh usloviyakh” (*Military-geographical vision of D.A. Milyutin and Russia's geopolitical priorities in the contemporary situation*) Scientific conference for the 200th anniversary of Milyutin's birth. Military Academy of the Defence Minister of Russian Federation, Moscow: June, 29, 2016.
- 3 The “Russian Geographical Society” (*Russkoe Geograficheskoe Obshestvo*, RGO) was established on August 6, 1845 as centre of scientific expertise to provide maps and geographical, ethnographic and statistical information for academic and state endeavours. Its foundation was inspired by the *Geographical Society of London* (1830) that served as a model for Russian scholars.
- 4 Milyutin, D.A.: “Kriticheskoe issledovanie znachenija voennoj geografii i statistiki” (*Critical Study of the Value of Military Geography and Statistics*) Military Journal, 1846, n. 1.
- 5 Gottfried Achenwall, 1719–1772. Royal adviser at the court of Great Britain and Brunswick-Lüneburg first explained the concept and scope of the “doctrine of the state organisation” He labelled it ‘statistics’ from the word *statista* (statesman) Achenwall's theory became the Codex of German University Statistics (*Codex der deutschen Universitätsstatistik*).
- 6 Milyutin, D.A.: “Pervye opyty voennoj statistiki” (*First experiences of military statistics*) Tip. Imperatorskoj Voennoj Akademii, St. Petersburg: 1847. P.31.

it exposes purpose, scope, and methods of the new branch through a selection of German sources. The substantial part of the work consists in an overview of the German Confederation by applying military statistics to investigate its armed forces and political system.

Milyutin reaffirms Achenwall's contention that *Statistics is the knowledge necessary to statecraft*. In adherence to the principles of the German statistical school the theoretical basis of geo-strategy are systematized by placing it in the framework of political sciences. Milyutin stresses that military statistics is based simultaneously on the guidelines of the art of war while "the theory of military art is strictly intertwined with the subject of political sciences because war by itself is a manifestation of the political life of states."⁷

As the subject of geo-strategy is the spatial relations between nations, its tasks are broader than collecting data on geography, weaponry, and warfare. According to Milyutin, military statistics should be equated with the theory of governing.

As the general puts it: "If statistics has in mind *all the goals* of the state and *all the ways* to achieve them, then it should also include as a goal of the capability to ensure the state's security, independence, and political meaning, considering *military forces* a mean to achieve this goal."⁸

Moreover, he points out that geo-strategy covers the political sphere and applies to the entire practical life of modern nations - finance, communications, and industry: "As the military embraces all of the state's means to ensure security or achieve its political goals by armed force, consequently Military Statistics embraces the whole composition of the state, assessing all the factors from a military point of view."⁹

Simply, its subject is the same as that of political sciences, i.e. "the basic elements of state's political life: country, territory, population, governmental structure, and laws. The difference is in the aims and methods of research. Whilst in economic and financial studies a territorial state is examined primarily in relation to soil productivity and the conditions of material well-being for the people living in it, Military Statistics focuses upon the properties of the territory which determine the state's means of successfully waging war. The same applies to

7 Id. p. 55.

8 Id. p. 51.

9 Id. p. 54.

the population, its material and moral condition, government structure, financial situation, etc.”¹⁰

Analyzing the factors essential to strengthen imperial power, Milyutin prioritizes population size and distribution, communication systems, the directions of railroads, public finances, governmental attitude towards people, and military regulations in peacetime and in wartime. According to him, because of Russia’s dispersed population, unfavourable geographical position, and economic backwardness, military statistics accomplishes in peacetime key administrative and political tasks of practical statecraft. In this respect it affects both foreign politics as well as internal geopolitics, by orienting the build-up of defence systems and the location of canals and railways. The same applies to the main industries and state-owned enterprises, “founded apparently for economic and civilian purposes but which integrate with military needs.”¹¹

“First experiences of military statistics” does not essentially establish new ways of thinking. Milyutin is an advocate of geographical determinism and postulates that location and nature influence directly the political sphere. His major theoretical contribution is the rationalization of the military rule in the process of statecraft.

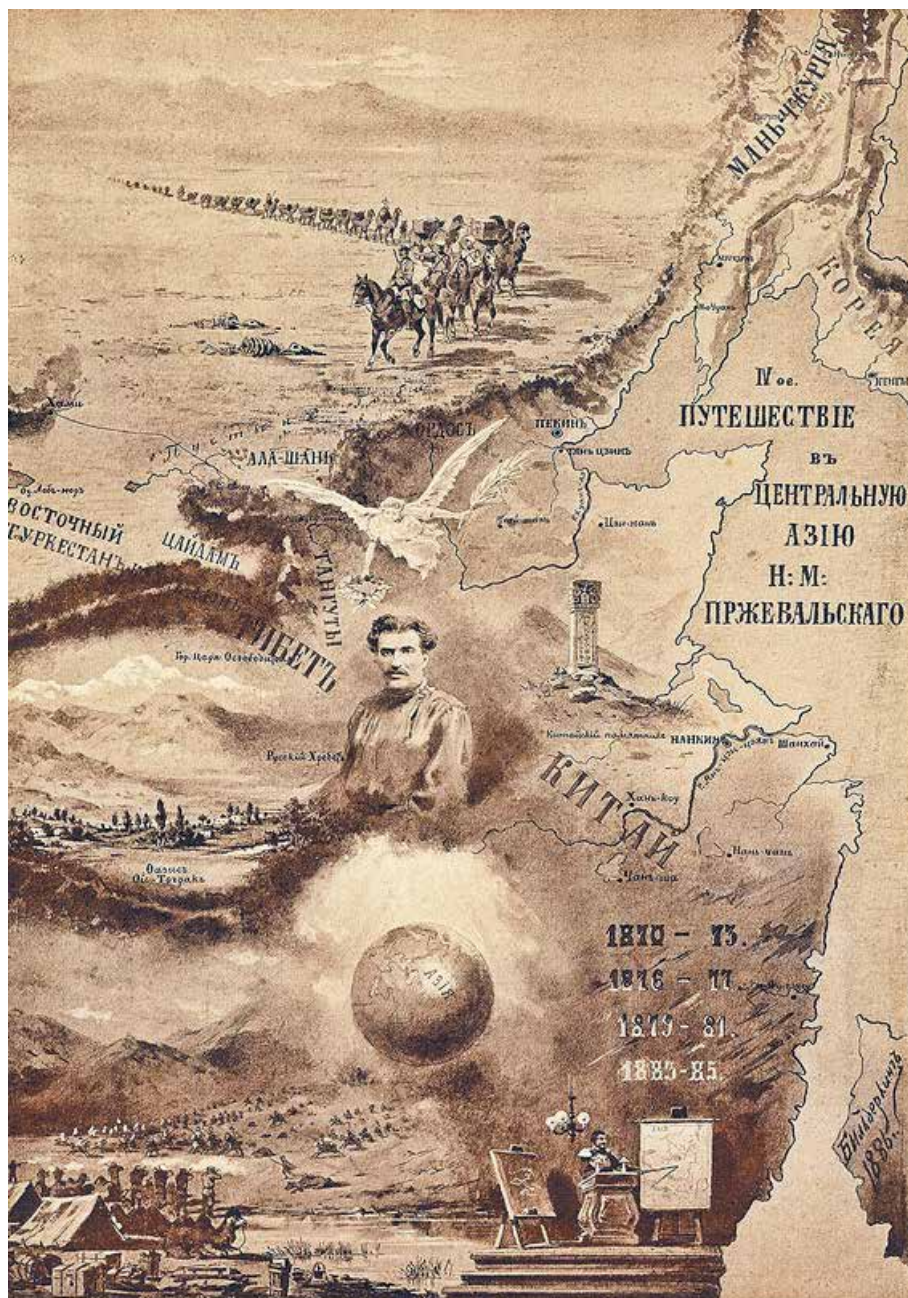
The relation between army and politics lies at the very core of geo-strategy. That’s not surprising. The new discipline doesn’t emanate from an abstraction but had a concrete starting point. Army’s involvement in the government was already a reality.

Under Nicholas I the tsarist state has become ever more dependent on the military apparatus. During his reign the army achieved a high degree of influence over administration. At the highest-level military technocrats assumed responsibility on purely political grounds while in the permanent branches of bureaucracy rank officers assisted civil service administrators for current affairs. Their power survived the Great Reforms marking a line of continuity from authoritarian to liberal conservatism.

The role of the military was far from being limited to defence politics, “as they held the main positions in all civil apparatuses, central and local, even in the Holy

¹⁰ Id. p. 56.

¹¹ Id. p. 68.



A. A. Bil'derling, Poster (1886) in *Memory of Travel in Central Asia* by Col. Nikolaj Michajlovič Prževal'skij (1839-1888). *Journey across Central Asia 1870-1873* (Puteshestvie v Zentralnuju Aziju 1870-1873 gg) Izd. Russian Geographical Society, St. Petersburg, 1875.

Synod.”¹² Hence, thanks to “geo-strategy”, systemic militarization becomes as a normal trait of the Russian state and is considered the germ capable of further evolution.

Geo-strategy conceived an idea of foreign affairs as follows: in human societies the space is power and international politics is the struggle of nations for space – an assumption that falls into the category of imperialism. To provide legitimacy and impetus for the policy of force, expansionism was represented as a determinant of the world system, founded on the conflicting relationship among territorializing states.

Milyutin placed this view of the international politics at the core of the subsequent theory and practice. His program of expanding abroad relied heavily upon “the imperial-justifying concept of the *protective nature* of Tsarist aggressive policy”¹³ claiming the right to occupy dominions as a recognition of Russia’s great power status.

As far as geo-strategy is concerned, he drew these expansionist plans: “advance in Central Asia to push the British Empire back from Russia’s frontier and to defy it in India; drive the Ottoman Empire out of Europe and create a Balkan confederation of client states under the Russian aegis; counter the English power in the Middle East and Europe by allying with France and Germany; secure Russian protection to China and Persia, which by virtue of their locations are the outer bastions of the Tsarist Empire.”¹⁴

Rise to the post of War Minister

Aspiring to the status of theoretical framework, military statistics oriented the development of Russian military science. “First Experiments of Military Statis-

12 Zakharova, L.G.: “Vospominaniya General-Feldmarshala Grafa D.A. Milyutina 1860-1862” (*Memories of General-Field Marshal Count D.A. Milyutin 1863-64*) Moscow: ROSSPEN 1999. p. 10.

13 Brezhneva, S.N.: “Zivilizatorskaya missiya kak opravdatel’nyj narrativ nastupleniya Rossii na Turkestan v trudakh Russkikh orientalistov. Konez XIX vek – Nachalo XX vek” (*Civilizing mission’ as acquittal narrative of Russian attack on Turkestan in the works of Russian Orientalists. End of XIX century - Beginning of XX century.*) *Voprosy teorii i praktiki*, Tambov: Gramota n. 8, 2011, pp. 44-47.

14 Morozov, E.F.: “Poslednij feldmarshal” (*The last Field-Marshal*) , Russkij geopoliticheskij sbornik, 1997, p. 36, nt. 2.

tics" easily passed the censorship's scrutiny. The Academy of Sciences awarded Milyutin the *Demidov Prize* for his work and the essay became a milestone of tsarist geopolitics, laying the methodological basis for a new branch of knowledge.

The High Staff of Tsarist Army began to put geo-strategy into practice by authoring seventeen volumes of "Military-Statistical Review of the Russian Empire" (*Voenno-statisticheskoe obozrenie Rossijskoj Imperii*). Published between 1848 and 1858 with Milyutin's contribution, the monumental work gives the physical and socio-economic picture of all Russian provinces, starting from Finland.¹⁵

In today's Russia Milyutin is presented to the public as the leading strategist of the so-called *Big Game* against the British Empire conceiving him as the "man behind Alexander II". Indeed, on the eve of the Great Reforms his lucid intellect won him a high degree of favour with the new tsar.

At the Committee of Ministers on the 3rd of January 1856, Alexander II paid great attention to Milyutin's report on the Crimean war. "The general stated that Russia had exhausted its human and food resources, stocks of weapons, gunpowder, shells, while the financial deficit and extreme backwardness of communication routes exacerbate the hardships. He highlighted the threatening economic crisis to the country - which really had a decisive influence on the decision to start peace negotiations."¹⁶

A manipulative talent assisted Milyutin in his rise to the position of grey eminence. Having won the Caucasian resistance and outlined successful plans for reforming the army he was appointed senior aide of War Minister and in 1861 - Minister of War. Holding the post until 1881, Milyutin marked an entire epoch. Thanks to the tsar's confidence, the general rebuilt the army and the navy anew introducing the concept of mass mobilization, military districts, and levy system.

Historians stress his contribution in laying the groundwork and the guidelines to brace Russia for its rivalry against Great Britain. Unlike his predecessor, gen. Sukhozanet, the new war minister had a vision. Beyond executive power, intel-

15 "Voenno-statisticheskoe obozrenie Rossijskoj Imperii T.1: Velikoe Knjazhestvo Finlandi-ja" (*Military-Statistical Review of the Russian Empire. The Great Principality of Finland*). Department of the General High Staff, St. Petersburg: 1848.

16 Solov'eva, A.M.: *Zheleznodorozhnyj transport vo vtoroj polovine XIX vek. (Rail transport in the second half of XIX Century)* Moscow: Nauka, 1975, p. 60.

lectual leadership was pivotal in planning to subdue Turkestan and turn it into a Russian spearhead towards India. From the beginning Milyutin embarked on a course aimed at challenging the English quest for dominance, from China to Persia and Afghanistan.

During his twenty-year long tenure of office, Russia had an uninterrupted territorial growth and balanced the standstill in Europe, re-drawing the map of Central Asia. Driven by the adherence to the dogma of *struggle for space*, geo-strategy emphasised the physical constraints and related national development to the expansionist process. One of its axioms was that the main task of territorial policy is to take possession of advantageous boundaries: seashores ensure leadership among great powers and independence from the neighbour states, while rivers form the core of a country's strategic routes giving direct access to the sea.

According to Milyutin each state prompts to expand landward or overseas and to fill the available space because colonial acquisitions sustain the development. His main argument runs as follows: "Among the white races the Russians are in the least favourable geographical and climatic location. Consequently, Russia will constantly break through to the sun and the warm seas due to its position. The Russian geography dictates such strategy: strengthening first at the southern boarder, the Central Asia, the most important strategic theatre and the most unprotected: thousands of kilometres of bare steppes without "natural boundaries" - mountains or rivers."¹⁷

Advocating for the conquest of Central Asia the war minister presupposed the primacy over the indigenous people who lived there. As the Tsarist Empire was theorized not just as a state, but as a civilization, he considered the undisputed predominance of Russian elements necessary for political stability¹⁸. In this respect geo-strategy owed much to the ideal of Russia's historical mission "on the altar of world's destiny". It sought to ensure progress by realizing separation from Asia of what they considered "advanced peoples" - an idea that was summarized by philosopher Solov'ev as "the victory over Asia in the perpetual war between

17 Shalak, A.V.: "Osnovy Geopolitika: teoriya, metodologiya, praktika". (*Fundamentals of Geopolitics: theory, methodology, and practice*) Irkutsk: Izd. VGU, 2014 p. 45.

18 See. Stepanov, V.L.: "Dmitrij Alekseevich Milyutin: Predpochitaju byt' kreditorom, chem dolzshnikom" (*Dmitrij Alekseevich Milyutin: "I'd rather be a creditor than a debtor"*) In: KARA-MURZA A.A. "Rossijskij Liberalism: idei i ljudi". Moscow: Novoe Izdatel'stvo, 2007. p. 218–228.

Christianity and the Islamic world”¹⁹.

Whereas Milyutin's contribution to tsarist geopolitical discourse is unquestioned, his role among the so-called “liberal bureaucrats” - the circle of open-minded senior officials inside the tsarist court - remains controversial. On the one hand the ideas of Milyutin reflect the belief in the Autocrats' divine right sharing the bias of the establishment, imbued with ideas of a natural social hierarchy. He believed that power differences within society mirror those in the international relations, where “might is right” and rejecting the liberal claims to divide political power with a Parliament.

On the other hand the war minister manoeuvred the ruling elite into pursuing policies that would favour economic development with the minimum of democratization. Closely connected with the business circles, he considered the advance of industry and agriculture the precondition to strengthen Russia's power, making it an efficient state.

Military statistics builds upon territorial policy, defined as the process to increase the country's physical space. Its logic relies on two intertwined concepts: that of “natural boundaries” (*estestvennykh graniz*) in their physical meaning of seas and mountains, and the notion of “uncharted space”, equivalent to “no man's land” (*terra nullius*). The latter implies that a territory fitting the label belongs to no one, allowing possession for the Tsar to be simply taken by hoisting the Russian flag.

Based on these theories Milyutin drew up the plans to incorporate more dominions into the empire. Since his appointment as minister, the new discipline set the tune of tsarist geopolitics. Looming up militaristic spirit, it inspired Alexander II and for two decades shaped the relationship of his war-mongering foreign politics to the *struggle for space*.

Geo-strategy rested upon civilization theories and mirrored their duplicity. On the one hand it drew upon the Russian-centred idea of ‘originality’ (*samobytnost'*) to claim national distinctiveness from Europe. On the other it represented the relationship with Asia as a hierarchy of power.

Connection between geographical and political identity reminded of the cul-

19 SNESAREV, A. E.: *Filosofija vojny* (“Philosophy of the War”), Mosca: Kuchkovo pole, 2003, p. 19.

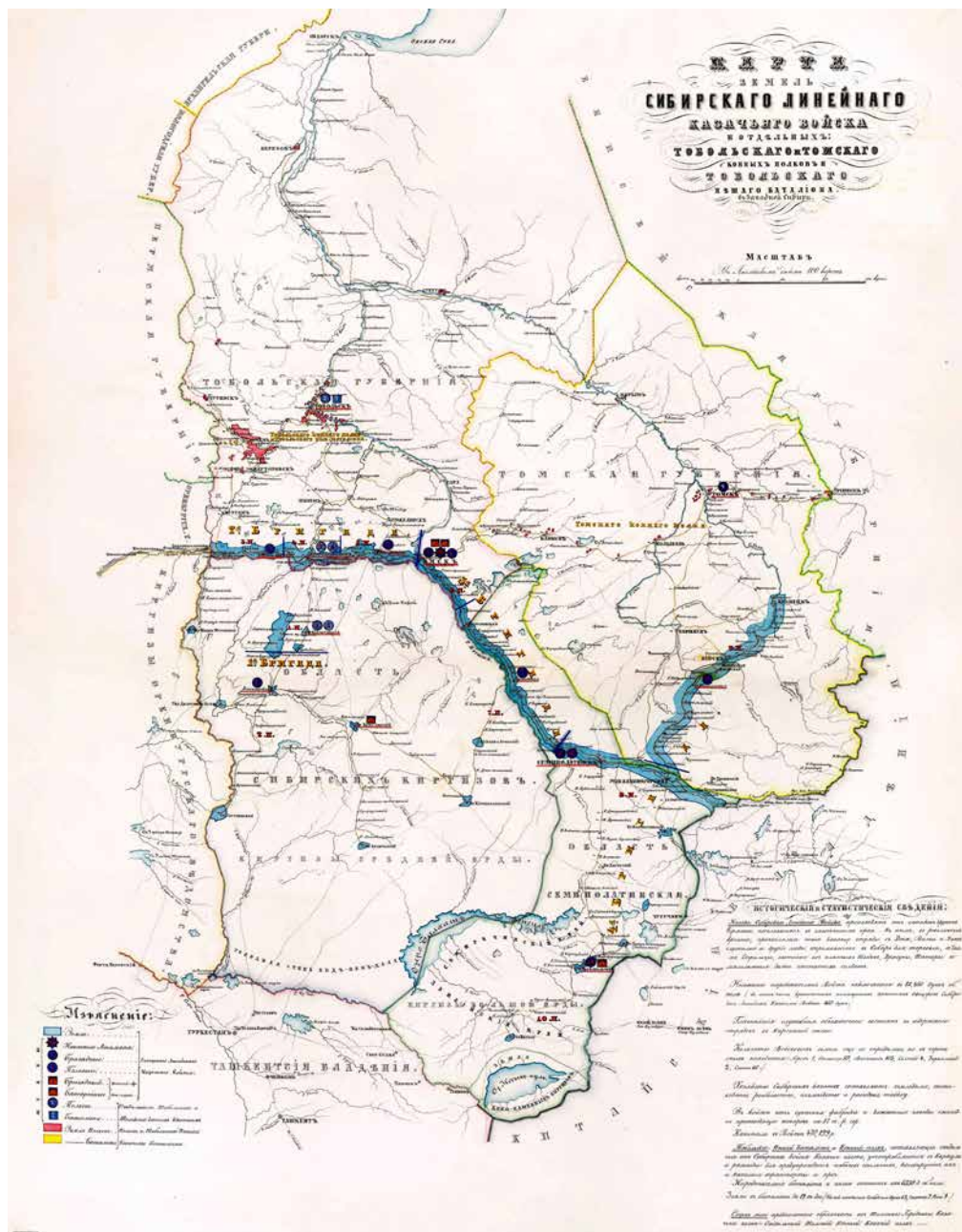
tural imagery of Western orientalism which ensures that the East is constructed as 'other' to the developed world. The same was for Russian orientalism which justified tsarist hegemony over what they considered 'backward Eastern people' with the thesis of "civilizing mission" claiming that metropolis belongs to a more advanced culture.

Milyutin's position embodied all the bias of the colonial mindset: the primacy of Russian element on the non-Russian peoples, the subordination of ethnic minorities to the "united and indivisible power" of autocracy, and the belief that native peoples living in imperial space belonged to the territory rather than territory to them – to pacify Caucasus he proposed the deportation of Circassians into tribal reserves. In his commitment against separatism the war minister repressed Polish revolts and launched punitive expeditions in North-Western territories, in Finland, and in Ostsee region.

In the 1860's, the geo-strategic interest focused upon so-called "Turkistan". The area covered the whole extension between the Caspian Sea and China, lying between Russia and Afghanistan, India, and Kazakhstan. At the time the territory was formed by three khanates - Bukhara, Kokand, and Khiva, an area of 1.330.000 sq. km that included today's Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kirghizstan. The Northern steppes have a severe nature while the Southern lands are irrigated by the rivers Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya and enjoy a favourable climate.

The annexing of "Turkistan" in the tsarist dominions represented a long-standing aspiration but progress had been slow. Sporadic small scale attacks had secured a strategic foothold in the region²⁰. Conquest was seen a natural development springing from Russian economic growth, as it opened a direct access for trade with the Far East by the overland route through the steppes. At the same time, it would achieve the goal of securing a successful boarder in Central Asia, where the Tsarist Empire was in competition with the English power.

20 A military expedition to conquer the Khiva Khanate was launched in winter 1839 by gen Perovsky, Governor of Orenburg. During the march his detachment lost half its men and was forced to retreat.



Geostrategy in Practice

The restart of the Central Asia policy (*Sredneaziatskaja politika*) was signalled by Milyutin's appointment as Ministry of War. According to his vision the boundless space between the Caspian Sea, the Siberian plains and the mountains of Afghanistan was the key to Eurasia, through which the economies of South-East Asia, China and India had linked over centuries with the Middle East and Mediterranean Europe via the trade routes along the ancient Silk Road.

The war minister placed foremost, the lobbies' demands for territorial expansion. Military statistics provided the basis for annexation plans, designed to push Russian borders still further towards the South-East and with that to the frontiers of British India. Turkistan was considered a geo-strategic as a land corridor, sited at the junction of the Pamir – India - Persia triangle. As the gate to China and the main road to India, its location was invested with the most political importance.

In the 1860s Russian economy was rapidly growing and demanding new markets. Great Reforms sprang up plants and factories filling in part the economic performance gap with the Western Europe. Modernization delivered an industrial and commercial boost and made the domestic production more competitive on the international market.

Petitions to promote favourable conditions for trade in Central Asia and reports on British competition in that area overwhelmed the ministries. Initially the government met the challenge simply providing information. Scout officers and diplomats reported that was too late to extend influence over Afghanistan while in the Khanates the Tsarist Empire faced the English political rivalry and commercial penetration.

There was growing intelligence that the British Empire had been preparing for a more direct role in the Khanates. The ruler of Kokand was in touch with emissaries of the Anglo-Indian government while English missions bargained with the Emir of Bukhara to organise shipping on the Amu-Darya River.²¹ In addition Russia was at loggerheads with Kokand, which controlled the access to the Xinjiang, because its hostile alignment intruded on commerce with China, hindering the build-up of the Beijing Treaty. Given the overwhelming superiority of the Tsarist

21 Halfin, N.A.: "Politika Rossii v Srednei Azii (1857-1868). (*The politics of Russia in Middle Asia 1857-1868*). Moscow: Vostochnoj literatury, 1960. p. 77.

army in the region, the idea of a military option, seeing war as “inevitable” made its way in the court.

Main heralds of the Eastern expansion were industrialists and businessmen. A press campaign for capturing new markets and sources of raw materials was mounted. Breeding a deep-rooted antagonism with the British Empire, this rhetoric placed in Central Asia the pivot area for trade and the flashpoint of the Anglo-Russian rivalry.

Business elites pushed for a shift to the East, stressing that “Russian enterprise from a long time has turned its activity mainly towards Asia. That is because in Europe the nations that civilised much earlier than us have locked out our activities toward the west.”²²

While the appeal of economic profits gave the impetus to justify the conquest of Turkistan, in the process of statecraft the practical conduct of the Central Asian policy opposed military establishment and liberal politicians. Main objections came from the foreign Minister Gorchakov, who feared that using force to change the Khanates' borders would cause complications with Great Britain. On the contrary, the High Staff insisted on the annexing of Turkistan envisaging that the geo-strategic foothold would offset the British influence in the region both commercially and politically.

Important divergences occurred inside the government ahead of the war plans' presentation. Foreign Minister Gorchakov rejected the military option. The Governor of Western Siberia gen. Dugamel, opponent of new territorial acquisitions, supported him as well as the ministry of Finance, Knyazhevich, who tried to stop an escalation by allowing duty-free export to Bukhara and by increasing the trade of industrial products.²³

The inflection point of this strife was the outbreak of American Civil war. From April 1861 the supplies of American cotton to Europe were almost totally interrupted. Russian textile industry, which was 90% dependant on raw materials from America, fell into crisis. Central Asian producers raised their exports to Russia fivefold, making up to 50% of all cotton imported but doubling the prices.

22 Berezin, I.: “Ob ucherezhdanii Aziatskoj kompanii v nachale nyneshnego stoletija” (*On the establishment of the Asian Company at the beginning of this century*) Vestnik promyshlennosti, T.X, 1860, n.10, P. 153–184,

23 Halfin, N. A.: *The politics of Russia in Middle Asia 1857-1868* p. 83-84.

The quick fix was to pursue dominance over Turkistan by military force.

In May 1861 the tsar appointed gen. Milyutin in place of gen. Sukhozanet at the Ministry of War and diplomacy shifted to a policy of force. To bypass the overlap between ministries, the general launched a preventive attack against Gorchakov accused of paying no attention to Central Asian affairs. As he stated:

“The Chancellor has kept from long time ago a position of complete conservatism on Asian policy, to not excite the diplomatic enquiries of the London Cabinet, which jealously monitors all our moves in the steppes (...) He doesn’t look at circumstances that force us to adopt military measures in the Asian neighborhoods and attributed every military initiative to the longing of local commanders for honours and decorations.”²⁴

The war minister strived to gain the tsar’s commitment by stressing that tribes controlled the steppes while southern boarder ran along English dominions. The demarcation line still was not marked between zones of influence and the wide spaces exasperated frontier’s permeability. Colonial conquest appeared to Milyutin the only way to interact with “our half-wild Asian neighbours. (...) In vain we hoped that it would no longer be necessary to advance further, as if, having left behind us steppes occupied by nomadic peoples, we had met a settled population, which had some kind of civil organisation.”²⁵

Alexander II supported the colonization “to bring Central Asia into the circle of the European civilization.” At the beginning of 1862 the tsar replaced the finance ministry Knyazhevich with von Reutern and appointed Director at the Asiatic Department of Minister of Foreign Affairs the skilled gen. Ignatiev, who inspired the Aguin Treaty.

Military statistics applied a utilitarian approach to policymaking. As von Reutern too was reluctant to finance military adventures Milyutin opted for economic rationale. In this case geo-strategic intertwined with commercial discourse. The hook was cast by senator Gagemeyer, an influential member of the Finance Committee²⁶.

24 Zakharova, L.G.: “Vospominaniya General-Feldmarshala Grafa D.A. Milyutina 1863-1864” (*Memories of General-Field Marshal Count D.A. Milyutin 1863-64*) Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003 p. 513.

25 Id.

26 Gagemeyer August Heinrich Anton Julius (1806 -1878) Financier and “liberal bureau-

Strong supporter of economic liberalism and private initiative he outlined on the "Russian Herald" a public manifesto asking for free trade routes toward Asia: "Industrial growth in Russia has changed its commercial interests and now it seeks new markets for the products of its factories. Although Russia's manufacture can't compete with European products, it can count on superiority over Asian goods. So, the markets of Central Asia, inaccessible to European goods, will provide huge sales to Russian production."²⁷

Gagemeyster associated geographical descriptions with improvement schemes to convert the steppe in fertile land. He located the key route for caravans in Central Asia but saw in "the predatory tactics of Turkmen tribes, which do not call for anyone's rule" the major threat hindering the free circulation of goods and people.

When representing Turkistan a place for agricultural enterprises his focus was on Southern lands: "there flow the waters of two vast river systems, the Amu-Darya, and the Syr-Darya, which irrigate a huge extension of fertile soils, abundant with all the gifts of nature. This rich basin extends from east to west but is divided between independent khanates the most notable of which are Bukhara, Kokand and Khiva."²⁸

The economist drew a minimalist programme of civilization fitting with the notion of "Russian order" (*Russkij porjadok*): the military occupation of the Syr-Darya river to ensure the free navigation of Russian ships and supply the troops on the Syr-Darya line; the building of forts on the Amu-Darya shores would stop the slave trade in the Khanate of Khiva and to subdue the Turkmen tribes roaming on the east coast of the Caspian Sea; the building of forts the Syr-Darya line to connect it with the Kirghiz-Siberian line; the implementation of steam navigation service along the Syr-Darya; the establishment of Russian factories in the colonies of Central Asian.

Albeit nor Gorchakov nor von Reutern were persuaded by economic argument war planning begun. Topographical and ethnic surveys preceded colonial endeav-

crat" at the Finance Ministry, Assistant chairman of the Russian Geographical Society, author of statistical studies on Siberia and Asia.

27 Gagemeyster J.: "O torgovom znachenii Srednej Azii v Rossii" ("On the trade importance of Central Asia in relation to Russia") *Russkii Vestnik*. 1862. № 10. p. 706 - 736.

28 Id.

our. Russian geographers entered the Khanates to gather intelligence and map the routes to Tjan-Shan. Following Semenov's trek, officers explored Kokand, the stronghold of Central Asia. Similarly, British scouts mapped the Eastern Turkistan²⁹.

The operational theatre included south Kazakhstan and the actual Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kirghizstan. The territory had, at the mid-nineteenth century, five million inhabitants³⁰ The most populated were the valleys of Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya and the cities: Tashkent (80 thousand inhabitants), Bukhara (70 thousand), Kokhara (70 thousand), Kokand (30-40,000), Samarkand (30,000).

The nomadic tribes of Kazakhs, Kirghiz, and Uzbeks were in fighting against each other, while the Khanate of Kokand struggled for Tashkent with the feuds of Bukhara, populated by Uzbeks and Farsi-speaking Tajiks, closed to Iranians.

According to Milyutin ethnic fragmentation and dispersed population offered an opportunity to carry out a rapid advance toward the major cities of Central Asia. He drafted a plan of incremental conquest: at first stage a joint offensive on Tashkent launched by the troops of the Orenburg and Siberian Corps; then an advance to Bukara and Khiva without interrupting the campaign till reaching the Empire's "natural boundaries".³¹ As for the indigenous peoples to the Khanates, they must be assimilated through Russification.

In December 1863 Alexander II approved the Milyutin's report. Getting ready for a massive offensive against the Khanates, the Russian press popularized the economic advantages of military conquest of Central Asia and emphasized the growing threat of British colonial infiltration from Afghanistan and the Trans-Caspian region.

In summer 1864 the southern steppes were the scene of a full-scale attack, guided by the minister of War. Benefiting from territorial contiguity with major military bases and given the inferiority of the enemy, the operations proved the increased ability of Tsarist army to display on the battlefield fully manned and equipped units. The troops advanced from Orenburg and Alma-Ata (Vernij),

29 See. The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society Vol. 36, 1866.

30 Gagemeyer J.: *"On the trade importance of Central Asia in relation to Russia"*

31 See. Gorshenina, S.: *"Asie centrale. L'invention des frontières et l'héritage russo-soviétique"* Paris : Ed CNRS, 2012. P. 95-182.



Portrait Gallery of Russian Celebrities = *Galerie de portraits de célébrités Russes* published by A. Munster: [In 2 volumes] / A. E. Munster. - St. Petersburg: printing and lit. A. Munster, 1864-1869. - Volume I - Ill. 57

moved move over vast distances and overwhelmed in bloody ground battles the forces of the Khanate.

The war in the Asian steppes alarmed British government, which addressed Russia with enquiries and rebukes. So, in November 1864 the Director of Asiatic Department invited Milyutin to inform the representatives at the courts of the great powers about Russia's operations, explaining the plans and scopes of its intervention in Central Asia.

Milyutin's diplomatic note is consistent with geo-strategic conception of annexing and deciphers the meaning of "natural boundaries" by practical geopolitics. The war ministry stated: "The long-known truth is that a State, encountering half-wild populations and even more so nomadic and predatory peoples, is compelled by the very force of things to gradually advance its frontier line and to seek new natural boundaries convenient for its protection. It's worth explaining how Russia has moved in this way in Central Asia, not because driven by any desire to expand its territory, but solely to curb and pacify the restless neighbouring tribes and to establish a civic mindedness (*grazhdanstvennosti*) among them."³²

Semi-Asiatic Russia was a great power by virtue of Westernization. Tsarist elites were formed in the cultural milieu of European colonialism, by which backwardness in a context of colonial asymmetry normally justifies the civilizational mission. Now, due to the contiguity between metropolis and dominions, the thesis of threat to borders posed by nomadic tribes became an explanatory device peculiar to Tsarist political discourse.

This formulation of Russia's *Eastward march* is summed up in the imperative to advance: "The only way to secure our Eastern periphery lies ahead. History has sent us forward. The nomads have called us with their raids. In this struggle with historical necessity lies the whole interest of our movement to Central Asia. (...) Bashkirs, Kalmyks and Kirghiz, crashed one by one against the unshakable power of Russian people, who saved themselves and Europe from the bloody invasion of savage hordes. Our further movement eastwards are characterised in this way: the neighbourhood with savages, who recognise no international law and no rights at all but the right of force, compels us to strengthen the frontier by

32 Zakharova L.G.: *Memories of General-Field Marshal Count D.A. Milyutin 1863-64*" p 520-521.

creating lines of fortresses”³³.

Consequently, line by line, Tsarist Empire establishes its dominance enclosing all the territories occupied by Asian peoples with new lines of fortifications: “This is how Russia is moving eastwards by rolling lines, in the vein pursuit of tranquillity. This programme, created by steppes and wild hordes, i.e. by geographical and historical conditions, is adopted by us due fatal necessity.”³⁴

Tsarist territorial theory relied on the principle of “natural boundaries” as well as on the idea of “accidental conquest of lands”³⁵. Thus, ignoring where the Central Asia borders ends and begins, the “serendipity of imperial expansion” marked southern frontier along two mountain ranges – the Pamir, along China and Afghanistan, and the Kopet Dag, between Turkmenistan and Iran. By June 1865 Tashkent was captured. In ten months of fighting Russian troops broke out to the south of Turkestan, extended offensive to the Khanate of Bukhara, defeated the Emir’s army and conquered Samarkand. In July 1867 Alexander II established the Governorate of Turkestan, headed by gen. von Kaufman, Chief of the Engineers Corps, and Milyutin’s assistant at the War Office. As General Governor he was the ruler of the indigenous people and exercised full civil and military powers.

Locally, Milyutin and von Kaufman launched a series of swift wars. In 1869, following the capture of Krasnovodsk, Russian army marched on Khiva. This time the expedition achieved full victory and the Khanate was subjugated. By 1873 Russia occupied Khiva and the khan recognised his vassal dependence. Thus, the Tsarist Empire gained control on the major route of the caravan trade to the interior of Asia.

In 1876 after revolts and bloody repressions the Kokand Khanate was erased. In 1881 Russia and Persia signed a convention to delimitate their possessions east of the Caspian Sea. Culminating a military effort lasting 15 years tsarist conquest of Central Asia reached Russia’s “natural boarder”, the Kopet Mountains,

33 Terenti’ev, M.A. “Rossija i Anglija v Srednej Azii” (*Russia and England in Middle Asia*) St. Petersburg: Merkul’eva, 1875 p. 5.

34 Id.

35 See: Gorshenina, S.: *In Search of “Natural Boundaries” of Russia’s Central Asia*. Workshop “Representations and Politics of Borders and Borderlands in Eurasia”; Ceelbas, Ideologies, Identities and Images in Motion Series”: December 2013, University of Manchester.

in Northern Persia.

The dividends of the war confirmed the convenience of military adventure. Profits for Russian economy skyrocketed. The annexation of Turkestan with all territories east of Amu-Daria River ensured the monopoly on Central Asia markets. Similarly to the effect of English imported products in India, in the Khanates' economies the competition of industrial goods made in Russia brought ruin to local producers.

Colonizers transformed Turkestan' agriculture into a cotton monoculture, while the decline in food crops forced local people to import the cereals from Russia. The conquest was completed with the Khiva vassalage treaty which ensured free navigation on the river and free trade of Russian goods up to the Chinese border.

Not surprisingly the Alexander II's turn to the East received positive assessment in the tsarist narrative – “the glorious mission of spreading civilization across the Asian continent”³⁶ – as from Soviet scholarly. For the former, despite the Turkmens, the Uzbeks, the Kyrgyz had been subjugated by colonialists their inclusion in the Russian Empire had objectively progressive effects because the annexing protected these peoples against feudal violence and helped spur the abolition of slavery.³⁷

Post-Soviet scholars are bringing back the idea of integrating backward societies into European civilization. Again, are underlined the positive consequences of the conquest of Turkistan, at firstly the commercial boost of trade with Asia and secondly strengthening Russia's defence against British threats along Southern frontiers.

Setting out Putin's lines for teaching history the notorious Orlov's handbook assesses that “the annexing of Central Asia to Russia had progressive aspects. Among them were the abolition of the slave trade, the end of the ruinous wars between local rulers, the abolition of heavy and numerous levies and taxes, the

36 Kostenko, L. F.; “Rasprostranenie russkogo vladychestva v Srednej Azii: istoricheskij ocherk”. (*Expansion of Russian dominions in Central Asia: historical profile*) Voennjy sbornik 1887, n.8. p. 148.

37 See: Semenov, A.: “Pokoritel' i ustroitel' Turkestanskago kraja, General-ad'jutant K.P. von Kaufaman” (*Conqueror and organiser of the Turkestan region, Adjutant General K.P. von Kaufmann*) Moscow: Kushnerev & Co, 1910.

development of Russian-Asian trade and the external security achieved by Russia's presence in the region. The political-military leadership achieved a strategic goal: to stop there the penetration of England, at the time dangerous and irreconcilable enemy of Russia."³⁸

Thus, current narratives neglect to deal with the distortions and misconception at their core. On the contrary, Russification it's identified precisely as a value, a *welcome gift*, as the colonization of the Asian peoples was important for the cross fertilization merging with the Russian avant-garde culture and science.

Milyutin himself constitutes an entire epoch in Russian military history. By inspiring the *movement to the East*, his geo-strategy offered a successful blueprint for conquest of Central Asia. The effectiveness of this narrative arose from focusing on territoriality and the self-imagery of Tsarist Empire as promoter of civilization. From theory to practice Milyutin's undisputed merit was the intertwining of economic and political factors with military statistics in implementing tsarist territorial expansion.

Nevertheless, except for imposing the "Russian peace" to the Khanates, geo-strategy failed to solve the questions which war was powerless to settle. Relying upon the culture of imperialism³⁹ it proved unable to integrate the submitted people within the developmental pattern of the Tsarist Empire. In the case of occupied Turkestan, the public discourse was shaped by the notions of "uncharted space" and "natural boundaries" while the conquerors portrayed Russia – and persist in portraying it, as a benevolent power that accomplishes a civilizing mission among wild Asian tribes.

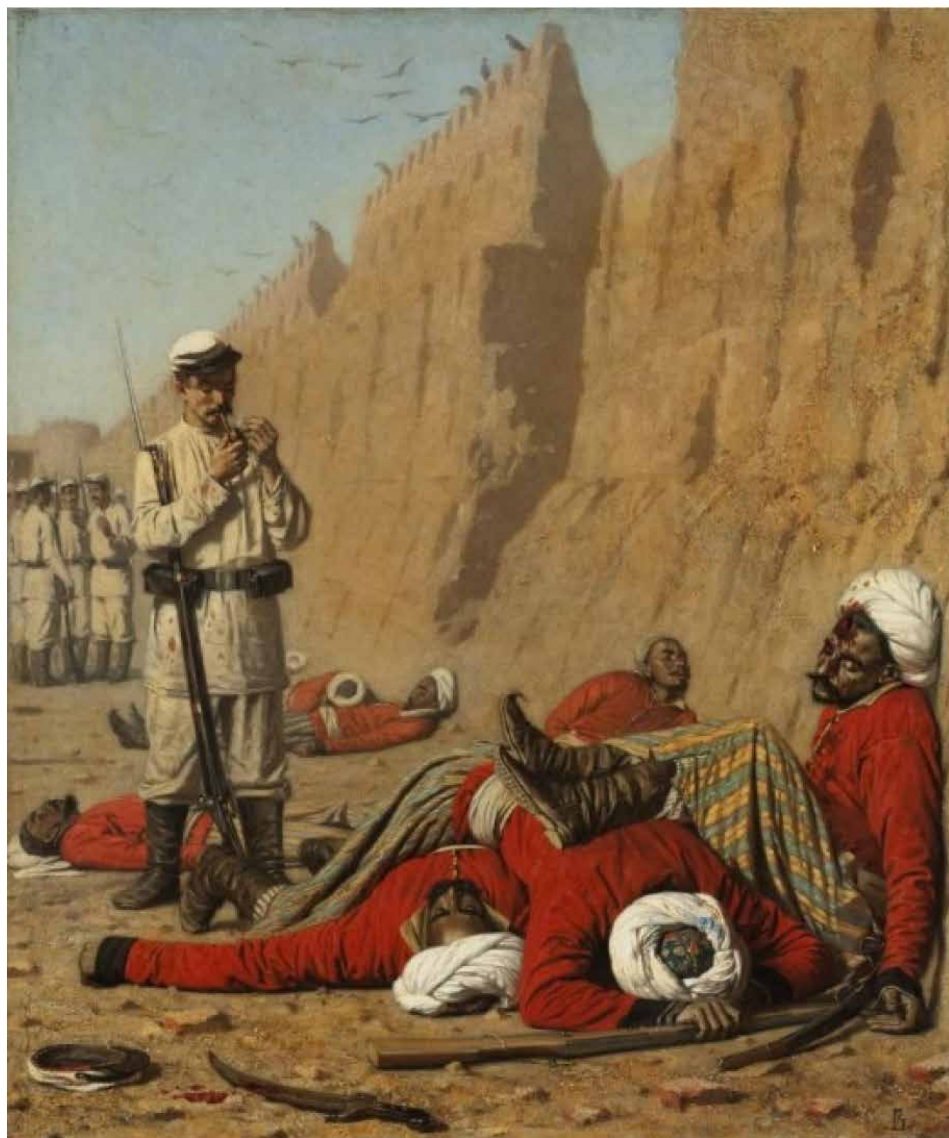
38 Orlov A. V "Vneshnjaja politika i Meždunarodnye otnoshenija Rossii s serediny XIX veka do 1918 goda" (*Foreign policy and international relations of Russia from the middle of the XIX century to 1918*). Textbook on the discipline 'Fatherland History'. St Petersburg: NIU- ITMO 2012 P. 69-70.

39 See: Said E. *Culture and Imperialism* New York: Vintage books, 1994.

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William Balfour Ker (1877-1918), *Knights of Columbus*, 1917 / Poster showing a priest looking heavenward and raising a crucifix, blessing kneeling soldiers. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Reproduction Number: LC-USZC4-10131
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