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Mahir ASLAN

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6345-7011>

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Military, Religion, and Power: Power Struggles in Russia in the Context of the Moscow Crisis of 1682

Asker, Din ve İktidar: 1682 Moskova Krizi Bağlamında Rusya'da Güç Mücadelesi


Mahir ASLAN *

Abstract: This study examines the Moscow Crisis of 1682 as a multi-layered struggle for power shaped by the interaction of military forces, religious movements, and competing court factions. It analyzes the succession crisis that followed the death of Tsar Feodor III, the rivalry between the Miloslavsky and Naryshkin families, and the politicization of the streltsy in this process. The study also explores the religious mobilization of the Old Believers (Raskolniki) and the strategies through which Sofia Alekseyevna utilized these forces to consolidate power. It argues that the events of 1682 should be understood not merely as a palace coup, but as a broader crisis that exposed structural weaknesses within the Russian state. Finally, it suggests that this crisis laid the groundwork for the centralizing reforms of Peter I and that these reforms also played a decisive role in shaping Russia's long-term geopolitical orientation toward the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

Keywords: Moscow Crisis of 1682 • Streltsy • Sofia Alekseyevna • Old Believers (Raskolniki) • Peter I • Political Power • Early Modern Russia

Öz: Bu çalışma, 1682 Moskova Krizi'ni askerî güçler, dinî hareketler ve birbiriyle rekabet eden saray içi hiziplerin etkileşimiyle şekillenen, çok katmanlı bir iktidar mücadelesi olarak ele almaktadır. Çalışmada, Çar III. Fyodor'un ölümünün ardından ortaya çıkan veraset krizi, Miloslavski ve Narişkin aileleri arasındaki rekabet ile bu süreçte streltsy'nin (tüfekçilerin) siyasallaşması incelenmektedir. Ayrıca Eski İnananların (Raskolniklerin) dinî mobilizasyonu ve Sofya Alekseyevna'nın bu güçleri kullanarak iktidarını pekiştirmek için izlediği stratejiler analiz edilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, 1682 olaylarının yalnızca bir saray darbesi olarak değil, aynı zamanda Rus devlet yapısındaki yapısal zafiyetleri ortaya koyan daha geniş kapsamlı bir kriz olarak değerlendirilmesi gerektiği ileri sürülmektedir. Çalışma ayrıca, söz konusu krizin I. Petro'nun gerçekleştireceği merkezileştirici reformların zeminini hazırladığını ve bu reformların Rusya'nın Karadeniz ve Akdeniz'e yönelik uzun vadeli jeopolitik yöneliminin şekillenmesinde de belirleyici bir rol oynadığını savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1682 Moskova Krizi • Streltsy (Tüfekçiler) • Sofya Alekseyevna • Eski İnananlar (Raskolnikler) • I. Petro • Siyasal İktidar • Erken Modern Rusya

* Asst. Prof., Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, İstanbul.  0000-0002-6345-7011 | savas.altun@msgsu.edu.tr

Introduction

By the late seventeenth century, the Russian Tsardom had entered a period of profound political instability that extended beyond a mere dynastic transition. Rather than marking only a change of rulers, this period reflected a broader transformation in the structures of power inherited from Muscovy. The death of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich in 1676 did not simply leave the throne vacant; it intensified an ongoing struggle for authority between the Miloslavsky and Naryshkin families, whose rivalry would come to shape the political trajectory of the following decade.

This study challenges the view that the Moscow Crisis of 1682 can be reduced to a mere “palace quarrel” between rival aristocratic factions. Instead, it argues that the crisis represented a broader and more complex struggle in which court rivalries, military dynamics, and religious movements became deeply intertwined. In this context, the study examines how intra-court competition contributed to the transformation of the *streltsy* from a professional military corps into an active political force. It also analyzes how the Old Believers (Raskolniki), by aligning their opposition to Patriarch Nikon’s reforms with the unfolding political conflict, assumed an important ideological and mobilizing role. Furthermore, the article explores how Princess Sofia, emerging from the secluded world of the *terem* (the upper-floor women’s quarters of the Muscovite court), mobilized these forces and thereby challenged established gender norms. Finally, it considers whether the violence and religious tensions of the 1682 uprising helped shape the mental and political framework within which Peter the Great’s later reforms would take place.

A defining feature of the 1682 crisis was the convergence of two distinct actors (the *streltsy*, a professional military corps, and the Old Believers (Raskolniki), a religiously conservative movement) around a shared commitment to *starina* (the “old order”). While the *streltsy* directed their actions against perceived corruption within the military hierarchy, the Old Believers articulated a broader religious opposition to ecclesiastical reforms, bringing their challenge to the symbolic center of authority in the Kremlin. This convergence expanded the scope of the crisis, transforming it from a court-centered conflict into a wider struggle in which political and religious claims to legitimacy became deeply intertwined. As a result, the contest for power increasingly unfolded not only within palace structures but also in public and religious spaces.

This study approaches the events of 1682 within the analytical framework of military power, religious mobilization, and political authority. It examines the institutional weaknesses that rendered the crisis difficult to control, emphasizing how competing actors operated beyond the limits of established structures. In this context, particular attention is given to the elimination of the experienced statesman Artemon Matveyev and the elevation of the *streltsy* to quasi-judicial authority, both of which are treated as illustrative cases of the paralysis of the state apparatus. The article is organized as follows: first, it examines the political and dynastic background of the crisis; then, it analyzes the role of the *streltsy* and the Old Believers; finally, it evaluates the broader implications of the crisis for the transformation of political authority in late seventeenth-century Russia.

Dynastic Crisis and the Struggle for Power Within the Court

Pyotr Alekseyevich, better known as Peter I, was born on May 30, 1672. The date of Peter’s birth coincided with the final years of his father Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich’s

reign¹. The Tsar's first wife, Maria Ilinichna Miloslavskaya, remained married to him from 1648 until her death in 1669. From this marriage, the Tsar had six daughters (Evdokia, Marfa, Sofia, Ekaterina, and Maria) and five sons. However, within the imperial family, male children in particular died at an early age. The eldest sons, Dimitri and Aleksey, died while their parents were still alive, and shortly after the death of their mother Maria Ilinichna in March 1669, Simeon also died². The two surviving brothers, Fedor and Ivan, were not in good health. Fedor was physically frail and lacked the resilience required to bear the heavy burdens of rule. Entrusting the throne to Ivan, who suffered from severe health problems, did not inspire confidence in Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich. Among the children, Sofia stood out for her energy, intelligence, and political awareness³.

The death of the tsarina not only left the forty-year-old tsar alone, but also began to occupy him with questions of whom he would leave the Russian throne to after his own death. The tsar's bachelorhood concerned not only himself but also his close circle. Two years after the death of his wife, the tsar decided to remarry, and a traditional bride-selection ceremony was held for him to choose his new wife. Although dozens of noble girls participated in the ceremony, the tsar chose 20-year-old Natalya Kirilovna Naryshkina, whom he had seen at the house of his friend Artem Matveev during a previous visit, and they were married in Moscow on January 22, 1671. Although Natalya Naryshkina was of noble origin, she came from a family that had lost much of its former wealth, and her youth and personal qualities likely influenced the tsar's decision⁴. The tsar's unconventional choice created unease within court circles, particularly for Artem Matveyev, as it was only a matter of time before they would find themselves entangled in palace intrigues and hostilities.

After sixteen months had passed, on May 30, 1672, Peter was born. From Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich's second wife were also born two daughters named Natalya and Feodora. Peter's birth was celebrated according to established traditions; the tsar sent letters announcing this state joy first to the patriarch, then to state dignitaries and prominent Moscow merchants. As an expression of his gratitude to God, the tsar pardoned some prisoners and those who were indebted to the state, while also arranging feasts of food

¹ Гуськов 2008, 11.

² Буровский 2008, 19, 20.

³ Труайя 2007, 4.

⁴ Sources describe the Tsar's meeting with Natalya Naryshkina in the following terms: Among those in the Tsar's inner circle, the one who undoubtedly won his affection the most was Artem Sergeevich Matveev. Although Matveev was not a well-known figure, he was intelligent and well educated. The Tsar, who was fond of Matveev, frequently visited him, and they would engage in long conversations. In those years, it was not customary for women to appear before men; therefore, women remained in rooms set aside for them, in a kind of harem. However, Matveev did not strictly adhere to this old Tatar custom, and his wife was able to attend gatherings where men were present. Matveev's wife, although Orthodox, was a foreigner and had received a good education. During one of his repeated visits, the Tsar saw Natalya, a young and beautiful woman who was a distant relative of Matveev and jokingly told her that he would find her a good husband. A few days later, when the Tsar was again a guest at the Matveev household, he told Natalya that he had found her a husband—and that the person was himself. Григорович 1860, 6–7; Шебальский 1873, 2.

and entertainment for the guests. In accordance with tradition, the ranks and titles of the princess's father, relatives, and close associates were elevated. These promotions and elevations meant the emergence of new centers of power in the Russian court and the beginning of the struggle for power with new actors⁵.

The anticipated struggle began when Peter was only four years old, with the death of his father Alexei Mikhailovich. Approximately three hours before his death, the tsar declared that Prince Fedor, who had previously been announced as the heir and had just turned fifteen, would be proclaimed tsar. Young Fedor, like his brothers, was ill, and in addition, he possessed a weak character⁶. The "assembly of the realm" which convened very quickly, also proclaimed Fedor as tsar. The Dutch ambassador Van Keller, who was present at Fedor's coronation ceremony on June 21, 1676, describes that day as follows: *All state dignitaries were adorned with gold and silver embroideries dressed in garments adorned with gold and silver embroidery, with richly decorated hats. Knez Mikhail Dolgorukiy threw gold and silver coins to the guests. A crowd of high-ranking people had gathered. While some were wishing the tsar prosperity, abundance, and wealth, those attempting to collect the scattered coins pushed and struggled against one another*⁷.

This scene, observed by the ambassador, foreshadowed the struggles that would soon unfold within the Russian court. The new tsar's mother was Maria Miloslavskaya, the first wife of Alexei Mikhailovich. Together with the new tsar, all the Miloslavskys began to regain power and dominance at court and started to put pressure on the Naryshkins, who were from the lineage of Peter's mother. They began with Artamon Matveyev, a close friend of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, the man who had introduced the tsar to Natalya Naryshkina and a family friend of the Naryshkins. The new tsar was told that Matveyev did not like him, that he was loyal to Natalya Naryshkina and her young son, Prince Peter. It was also suggested to the tsar that Matveyev intended to depose Tsar Fedor Alekseyevich and place Peter on the throne, ruling the country together with his mother. According to these accusations, in the final days of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, Matveyev had wanted Peter to be declared heir instead of Fedor, and that Matveyev and Maria had acted together in this matter, but they had not been allowed near the tsar before his death and therefore had been unable to implement this plan. Although the young tsar did not take seriously the accusations made by Matveyev's enemies, especially the Miloslavskys, for approximately the first six months, when the accusations persisted insistently, the tsar decided to get rid of Matveyev⁸.

After I. M. Miloslavski had dealt with Matveyev, it was the turn of the Naryshkins. Following the terrible exile that befell Matveyev in 1676, the Naryshkins were expecting and prepared for many things that could happen to them. I. M. Miloslavski began with Natalia Kirillovna; he tried to drive a wedge between her and Tsar Fedor, but the tsar respected his stepmother and protected her from all attacks and insults. When this attempt failed, Miloslavski decided to continue through the tsarina's relatives. First, he accused Ivan Kirillovich Naryshkin of intending to kill the tsar; after being tried, Ivan Kirillovich was exiled to Ryazan. After Ivan Kirillovich, his brother Afansiy and the other Naryshkins were exiled from Moscow. Assuming that the Naryshkins had been

⁵ Павленко 2017, 7; Труайя 2007, 5.

⁶ Чистякова 1871, 21.

⁷ Труайя 2007, 7.

⁸ Труайя 2007, 7; Чистякова 1871, 21–22.

effectively neutralized, Miloslavski also managed to remove from the court and from Moscow some individuals whom he considered dangerous due to their closeness to them, by means of exile⁹.

Fedor Alekseyevich and his sisters did not like the relatives of Natalya Naryshkina, who was both Peter's mother and their stepmother. After the exile of their family friend Matveyev and his brothers to Siberia like traitors without any accusation, Natalya Naryshkina had fully understood that after all these exiles and removals she could no longer remain in Moscow, especially in the Kremlin, because all the key positions in the Kremlin had come under the control of the Miloslavskys¹⁰. To be subjected any longer to the rudeness of the tsar's close circle and his sisters in the Kremlin Natalya Naryshkina, who did not wish this, settled with her son Peter in the village of Preobrazhenskoye, not far from Moscow, and began to live in relative seclusion there. Peter also grew up in Preobrazhenskoye, living a life like other village children, growing up within nature¹¹.

The young tsar Fedor Alekseyevich was also concerned with the issue of succession after himself. From his first wife Agafya Semenovna, he had a son named Ilya on July 11, 1681, but the tsarina died immediately after giving birth on July 14, and the newborn son also died six days later. Exactly seven months after the death of his wife, on February 14, 1682, the young tsar remarried Marfa Apraksina. Although the tsar had no children from this marriage, he himself died on April 27, 1682¹². The sick and weak Tsar Fedor Alekseyevich, who had ruled for a total of six years, died without leaving behind a child who could be his heir. Since Fedor Alekseyevich had neither left nor appointed an heir, the state was naturally left without a head. Prince Ivan, the elder of Fedor, suffered from a visual illness to the extent of being almost blind and was therefore not in a condition to deal with state affairs. However, the younger Prince Peter differed from the others both in terms of his health and his abilities¹³.

With the ringing of the bells announcing the tsar's death, large crowds gathered at the Kremlin to bid farewell to the deceased tsar and to greet the new one. Meanwhile, after informing the boyars of the tsar's death, the patriarch asked them which of the princes would become tsar, Ivan or Peter. Behind both young princes stood groups that wished to hold power. While Tsar Fedor was still alive, the court had been divided into three groups or factions. In the early years of his reign, governance was in the hands of his maternal relatives, the Miloslavskys. At the head of this group stood the elderly boyar Ivan Mikhailovich Miloslavsky. Other prominent members of the group were the former Kazan commander I. B. Miloslavsky, the stolnik Aleksandr Miloslavsky, and the Tolstoy brothers Ivan and Petr Andreyevich. Another influential figure supporting this group through kinship ties was B. M. Khitrovo, and the core of this influential group was Princess Sofia, one of the tsar's daughters. In the final years of the tsar, while the Miloslavskys somewhat lost their influence, the figure who gained prominence at court was the boyar Ivan Maksimovich Yazykov. Another who gained the tsar's favor alongside Yazykov was the postelnichy Aleksey and the cupbearer Semen Likhachev.

⁹ Балдин 1915, 37–38.

¹⁰ Тихомиров 1905, 8–9; Павленко 2017, 8.

¹¹ Шебальский 1873, 3.

¹² Буровский 2008, 20–21.

¹³ Тихомиров 1905, 11.

The rise in importance of Yazykov and the Likhachevs at court is particularly related to Yazykov's marriage, a few months before the tsar's death, to Marfa Matveyevna Apraksina, a relative of his. The third group consisted of the Naryshkins, who had been removed from the court and were led by Natalya Naryshkina, along with those close to them. Undoubtedly, the most important and influential figure of this group was the experienced statesman A. S. Matveyev. Apart from Matveyev, since the father and son Naryshkins did not possess significant political careers or weight, this group had little influence without Matveyev. Meanwhile, with Tsar Fedor's second marriage, the situation of the Naryshkins seemed to improve somewhat in the final days of his life. For the tsarina Marfa Apraksina was the goddaughter of Matveyev and he made several appeals to the tsar for his pardon, return, and the improvement of his position. Other influential figures of this second group, Yazykov and the Likhachevs, were also striving to approach the Naryshkins. In light of all these developments, the subsequent struggle for power would take place between two groups: the Miloslavskys and the Naryshkins¹⁴.

After the crowd that had rushed to the Kremlin dispersed, the patriarch, leaving both princes beside their father, proceeded with the state dignitaries and the clergy present there to the next hall in order to resolve the matter by selecting one of the two princes. Here, the patriarch proposed that the new tsar be chosen by a public vote. Thereafter, the patriarch, together with all the authorities and dignitaries, went out onto the balcony and announced to all officials and the people to gather in front of the church. Shortly afterward, addressing the people gathered in front of the church, the patriarch made the following proclamation: *Tsar Fedor Alekseyevich has died by the will of God. He left behind two brothers, Ivan Alekseyevich and Petr Alekseyevich, but did not leave an heir. I ask you, Orthodox Russians, say with a clear conscience which of the princes should be tsar. Whomever you say shall be tsar! While the patriarch was speaking, a deathly silence prevailed among those listening in the square; as soon as the patriarch finished his speech, those gathered in the square all shouted with one voice that Tsar Petr Alekseyevich should be tsar. Subsequently, the patriarch addressed the boyars with the same question, and they also approved the people's choice by declaring that Petr Alekseyevich, chosen by the people, should be tsar. The patriarch and those with him returned to the Kremlin and consecrated the tsardom of the ten-year-old Peter*¹⁵.

All of Russia had pledged allegiance in Moscow, and in Moscow to Peter; everyone was pleased with the selection of Peter as tsar, except for the princesses and the Miloslavskys. For those who had lost power and the strength it brought, the only thing to do was to wait for the appropriate moment. The patriarch's selection of the young Peter as tsar had proceeded without issue, but due to his young age, it seemed almost impossible for him to sustain the tsardom. A trustworthy regent had to be found immediately for the young tsar, and under the existing conditions, this person could be none other than the tsar's young mother. It did not take long for Natalya Naryshkina to understand that the administration was not yet fully in their hands and that their enemies were lying in wait. Power had to be strengthened with their own cadres and close associates¹⁶. Natalya Naryshkina took certain steps from the very first day to shift

¹⁴ Григорович 1860, 14; Павленко 2017 9; Богословский 1940, 37–38.

¹⁵ Чистякова 1875, 31.

¹⁶ Тихомиров 1905, 12–13.

the existing balance in their favor and immediately informed the exiled family friend Artamon Matveyev of what was happening in Moscow and summoned him back to Moscow. She then appointed her brother Ivan Kirillovich Naryshkin as armorer and boyar¹⁷.

With these moves of the Naryshkins, the Miloslavskys began to decline. Without showing any tolerance to the enemy, everything that had been in the hands of the Miloslavskys was taken from them. The Miloslavskys had expected to pay a heavy price for the exile of Matveyev and the expulsion of Natalya and her son from the Kremlin, but this did not happen. Knez Vasiliy Golitsyn, who had been their ally until very recently, Yazykov, The Knez Hovanskys and the Dolgarukys became their enemies. However, it was not only this; the negligence and carelessness of the administration of Tsarina Natalia, who was attempting to seize power, caused the situation to change very rapidly. One of the important reasons for Pyotr's selection was also the result of a shared hatred toward the Miloslavskys. The Miloslavskys were not liked by the people, and likewise the high-ranking officials in the Kremlin, the patriarch, and the Streltsy also did not favor them. At this point, the Miloslavskys themselves were surprised that, with the wealth they had acquired, they were allowed to remain in Moscow¹⁸.

In addition to the surprise and discomfort of the Miloslavskys, one of those disturbed by the transfer of power to Pyotr (and the most important among them) was Princess Sofia. Among the daughters of the tsar, the only one who wished to ascend the throne was Princess Sofia. It was strictly forbidden for foreigners to enter the tsarist harem; among the few who were permitted were the patriarch and the relatives of the princess. The women of the harem spent most of their time with handicrafts, worship, and religious fasting. The public knew the women of the palace by their names and by the alms they distributed to the poor. Almost all of them died without marrying, because religious differences did not allow marriage even with foreign princes; therefore, the princesses and other palace women lived, in a full sense, a monastic life. Such a restricted lifestyle, however, did not align with Sofia's ambitions for greater influence and political authority. Thanks to her cunning and agile intelligence, Sofia succeeded in gaining the trust of Tsar Fedor and, by constantly staying at his side during his illness, tried to ingratiate herself with him. The years during which Fedor was in power became, so to speak, a school for Sofia. Sofia did not remain only with the tsar; she also became acquainted with and established close relations with the leading statesmen close to him, and toward the final years of Fedor's reign she gained great influence in state affairs. This active presence of Sofia in palace life and state affairs gave her the hope that she could seize control of the administration during the rule of her brother Ivan, who was ill and weak in character and who would ascend the throne after Fedor. Sofia was not alone in her idea of seizing power and governing the state. Prince Vasiliy Golitsyn, Ivan Miloslavskiy, priests, and again among the religious leaders Silvestr Medvedev openly began to support Sofia, believing that she was suitable to govern the state¹⁹.

Princess Sofia revealed during the funeral ceremony of Tsar Fedor that she had no intention of allowing the power, which was slipping away before her eyes within a few days, to pass to Pyotr and his circle. Contrary to the customs of that day, Sofia walked

¹⁷ Бринкер 1882, 24.

¹⁸ Полевой 1843, 50-51.

¹⁹ Григорович 1860, 16-17; Майоровна 2011, 50.

behind the coffin and came to the church; it was not considered appropriate for princesses and palace women to participate openly in such ceremonies. Although they tried to persuade her on this matter, she did not listen to anyone and succeeded in drawing the attention of the gathered people. While Tsarina Natalia was leaving the church with her young son Pyotr before the funeral ceremony had ended, Sofia, complaining that due care was not being shown to the memory of Tsar Fedor, sent a priest to Tsarina Natalia. After the funeral ceremony, as Sofia was leaving the church, she addressed the people in tears as follows: *do you see how our brother, Tsar Fedor, departed from this world so unexpectedly; treacherous enemies poisoned him. Show mercy to us orphans; we have neither mother nor father nor brother There was. Our elder brother Ivan was not chosen as tsar; if we have committed any fault before you and the boyars, send us alive to Christian kings, to their foreign lands. This speech of Sofia had a great impact on the people*²⁰.

For the Miloslavskys, who thought that the sickly Ivan would not provide them with any benefit in the struggle for power, the most suitable candidate was now Princess Sofia. The princess, who was ready to do everything to seize power, first tried the path of persuasion with the support she had received. For this purpose, Sofia invited the patriarch, the leading clergymen, the boyars, and selected individuals from all layers of society to her presence and spoke with them at length. The princess, after conveying to the attendees the unnecessary and dangerous nature of choosing the young prince as tsar, the violation of the dynastic rule based on lineage, the inevitability of this, and warnings such as the influence of powerful individuals over the young tsar, as well as the demand that all the Streltsy collectively wished to see the elder Prince Ivan as tsar, concluded her speech with the following request: *without delay, raise Ivan Alekseyevich to the throne together with Pyotr; I warn you, otherwise both the state and the ruler himself will be in danger*. The patriarch and those with him, as well as everyone not present there, declared in one voice that the oath had been given once and could not be violated, that a dual tsardom had never been heard of in Russia, and that it would be dangerous²¹.

For Sofia and her allies, the Miloslavskys, who did not receive the answer they expected from the dignitaries and the patriarch, this response was a clear sign that the time had come not to persuade through speech but to use force, that is, to play the Streltsy card²². Until the time of Ivan Grozny, there was no standing army in Russia. In the event of war, an army was assembled from all over Russia. By order of the ruler, landowners equipped as many soldiers as they were responsible for and joined the army with them. Soldiers were generally equipped with revenues obtained from church, monastery, and state lands. The ruler appointed the commander-in-chief, and he in turn appointed those of lower rank. With the end of the war, the soldiers returned to their homes as before. Since this irregular army was not trained, it was not very suitable for military affairs. The political developments of the period of Ivan Grozny made it necessary to have a regular army that would protect large cities and Moscow in peacetime and fight in wartime, receiving its salary from the treasury; these were the Streltsy. The established Streltsy units lived in their own neighborhoods with their

²⁰ Бринкер 1882, 25.

²¹ Ламбин 1843, 51.

²² Бергман 1840, 45.

families. Ranks among them passed from father to son, and supporters and free individuals were accepted into the units. The Streltsy were provided with salary, clothing, and weapons from the treasury. Since they had their own lands, they could engage in trade and business, and they were exempt from all kinds of taxes. They served as long as their strength allowed; those who were wounded, lost limbs, or became too old to serve were placed in monasteries for care²³. Compared to the army drawn from the people, the Streltsy army, which was better armed and trained, rendered significant service to the Moscow state. However, especially in recent times, particularly during the reign of Tsar Fedor, the Streltsy units turned into places where troubled and rebellious individuals gathered²⁴. In these days, the greatest misfortune of the Streltsy was that the boyar responsible for them was the aged and paralyzed Prince Yuriy Alekseyevich Dolgorukiy, and his assistant was his son Mihaylo Yuryevich, who was not liked by the soldiers. When the Streltsy complained about the unjust enslavement and cruelty of their own commanders, Prince Dolgorukiy ordered that a selected Streltsy be flogged publicly in front of his house so that he would serve as an example to the others. Those who came to carry out the order were driven away, and the Streltsy succeeded in rescuing their comrade from their hands. This incident took place on the night of April 25, and the next day there was a noticeable agitation caused by this event in all Streltsy quarters except three. These were the days when Tsar Fedor was lying on his deathbed. Sixteen Streltsy regiments prepared a petition reflecting their common opinion, intending to present it to the tsar himself, but on April 27 the tsar died and was replaced by the ten-year-old Prince Petr Alekseyevich. All these developments led the Streltsy to wait for a while and act according to the course of events²⁵.

These developments show that power in the Russian court was determined not only through dynastic succession but also through competition among aristocratic cliques. The struggle between the Miloslavskys and the Naryshkins went beyond a classical succession crisis and revealed the fragmented structure of power centers in state administration.

The Streltsy and the Politicization of Military Power

On April 30, 1682, that is, three days after the death of the tsar and the selection of Pyotr, the Streltsy came to the palace and demanded that nine commanders who were not liked by the soldiers be handed over to them²⁶. In the petition they submitted to the Kremlin, the Streltsy directed the following accusations against the commanders: *With the money collected for us in our lands, the commanders built large estates for themselves. The commanders send our women and children to their villages to cut wood and work in the fields, while sending us to carry out their own personal tasks. By force of beating, they compel us to buy kaftans, hats, and boots for them at our own expense, and they also seize the salaries and provisions sent by the ruler*²⁷. The Streltsy declared in unison: *Either hand over the commanders as hostages or fully compensate us for the money we have lost. Otherwise, we ourselves will lynch them and plunder their houses and animals.* At the same time, by naming certain individuals from among the palace people, they issued threats

²³ Тихомиров 1905, 14-15.

²⁴ Полевой 1843, 53-54.

²⁵ Бобровский 1900, 105.

²⁶ Павленко 2017, 10.

²⁷ Тихомиров 1905, 16.

that they would reach other traitors as well. These disturbances had significant effects in the palace, The inexperienced Naryshkin administration, rather than addressing the accusations through established legal procedures, chose to hand the commanders over to the Streltsy²⁸.

There was no experienced figure beside Tsarina Natalia who could find a way out in such situations. The inexperienced government, which was frightened in the face of the Streltsy and did not know what to do, decided to arrest and detain the accused commanders, but this did not satisfy the Streltsy, and they insisted that the commanders be handed over to them²⁹. Foreseeing how uncontrollable and bloody the events could become, the patriarch sent many clergymen, including metropolitans, to the Streltsy and tried to persuade them to trust the fair judgment of the government and to give up their demand to have the commanders brought to their own barracks, and they succeeded in convincing them. The next day, the reckoning began and lasted for about a week. The commanders were tied to pre-prepared wooden posts and beaten for about two hours daily until the money demanded from them was paid. Everything was done in the name of the government, but according to the will of the Streltsy. The Streltsy gathered in the square had arranged themselves like a court in front of the ministry. The interrogations, which involved physical coercion, continued until the Streltsy themselves decided to bring them to an end³⁰.

The granting of authority to the Streltsy in the process of trying and punishing the commanders was, for the government, not only an act of recklessness but also an irreparable mistake. The government could have resolved the matter without receiving any assistance from the Streltsy, and even without involving them in the issue. By allowing the Streltsy, the government effectively accepted their interference in state affairs and even their power to judge and punish. This weakness shown by the government in the face of the Streltsy brought with it a lack of order and security, and the cause of the existing situation was again the Streltsy themselves. Just as no one stopped them, no one held them accountable for what they had done. Emboldened by what they perceived as a victory, the Streltsy gathered in their quarters and celebrated this situation. Since the hierarchical relationship among them had lost its importance, they openly displayed disobedience toward their superior, Prince M. Dolgoruki³¹.

While this bloody action of the Streltsy on the one hand revealed the weaknesses of the government, on the other hand it gave Princess Sofia and the Miloslavskys a strong idea of where and with whom they should continue on their path. The unrest among the Streltsy greatly pleased Ivan Miloslavki and Princess Sofia and revealed the fact that, in the face of the consequences of the chaos created by the Streltsy, they were seeking a point of support that would justify them and provide them with refuge. The allies, who were able to foresee what this situation could offer them, understood that they could use the Streltsy unrest and turmoil for their own purposes. The Streltsy, already inclined to form shifting alliances, proved to be a highly unpredictable force, became for Sofia and the Miloslavskys the most reliable and they began to appear as the most suitable individuals. As the Streltsy lacked clear leadership and direction, they became

²⁸ Аристов 1871, 68.

²⁹ Соловьёв 1895, 895.

³⁰ Устрялов 1858, 24.

³¹ Балдин 1915, 93-94; Полевой 1843, 55.

susceptible to manipulation by various political actors³².

The transformation of the Streltsy in this process from merely a military unit into an actor directly putting forward political demands indicates a significant rupture in the structure of the Russian state. The fact that the government effectively transferred the authority of judgment and punishment to the Streltsy clearly revealed the weakness of the central authority.

The 1682 Uprising and the Re-establishment of Power through Violence

Sofia shared her thoughts regarding the existing situation with her trusted uncle Ivan Miloslavski. He, pointing to the newly rebellious Streltsy, proposed that through a bloody uprising all the Naryshkins could be eliminated, and the princess accepted this idea. After a list of those to be killed was prepared, they agreed on a plan of action. According to the plan, the following news would be spread among the Streltsy units: Tsar Fedor had been poisoned, and when a successor to the deceased tsar was being chosen, the boyars, due to pressure from the Naryshkins, had ignored the elder prince who should have been selected. Just as they intended to kill the tsar himself, they were also planning to kill the prince and seize power³³. Ivan Miloslavski, the leader of the Miloslavski group, was a very cunning and sly individual and was also liked by the Streltsy. While implementing his plan, Ivan Miloslavski, in order to remove all suspicion from himself, claimed that he was ill and could not receive anyone, while at the same time working behind the scenes through his close associates³⁴.

Sofia and the supporters of Miloslavski began to prepare the Streltsy in Moscow for rebellion on the basis of the falsehoods they had previously prepared. In the final days, the preparations for the uprising continued openly, completely removed from secrecy. Large assemblies held within the Streltsy units suddenly gave way to military agitation. Accompanied by drums and kettledrums, the processions leaving the church armed themselves without their commanders. In the city, the Streltsy gathered at various meeting points spoke fearlessly and proudly of the uprising, shouting that it was Ivan, not Pyotr, who should sit on the throne, that the elder brother had been forcibly removed from the throne, that the Streltsy did not want to listen to the Naryshkins and Matveyev, and that they would cut off their heads³⁵. Almost all the Streltsy units, except for a few, were ready for the uprising with execution lists in their hands. However, their leaders, who were behind the uprising, waited for one victim to arrive in Moscow before beginning, because he was at the top of the list there was, and this person was undoubtedly the experienced statesman Artemon Sergeyevič Matveyev, a family friend of the Naryshkins³⁶.

Tsarina Natalia Naryshkina and her advisors were aware of and recognized the danger, but they thought that as long as they did not penetrate Sofia's bloody plan, they could remain distant from it for a while. The Naryshkin group was waiting for the arrival of Matveyev, because the tsarina and her circle were far from making any decision

³² Балдин 1915, 97-98.

³³ Устрялов 1858, 28-29; Бобровский 1900, 106.

³⁴ Ламбин 1843, 54.

³⁵ Штраух 1928, 23.

³⁶ Устрялов 1858, 30.

without him, and the salvation of their lawful power was in a sense dependent on him³⁷. Unfortunately, Matveyev's arrival in Moscow on May 11 became, rather than saving many lives, a signal of the bloody uprising. The initial reception shown to the statesman, who had been in exile for several years, was quite favorable; he was shown respect by different groups. Even the Streltsy units sent salt and bread and honey on a sharp knife as an expression of respect for the new guest. While coming to Moscow, seven Streltsy whom Matveyev encountered on the road warned him about the unrest among the Streltsy and the danger that could come to him from them, but Matveyev did not take any precautions in this regard³⁸.

Sofia's accomplices accepted Matveyev's arrival in Moscow as a sign and set about the task they had to carry out. On the morning of May 15, Aleksandr Miloslavski and Petr Tolstoy went around the Streltsy units spreading the rumor that "the Naryshkins strangled the prince" and with this rumor the uprising was ignited. Drums began to be beaten in all the units, the Streltsy took up arms, and even a few cannons were taken as they moved toward the Kremlin³⁹. Although Matveyev, who had arrived in Moscow only two days earlier, did not have enough time to understand the events and take the necessary measures, he ordered that the gates of the Kremlin be closed, but the Streltsy were already inside. Understanding that the Streltsy were worried about the life of Prince Ivan, Tsarina Natalia, together with the patriarch, appeared on the balcony with Prince Ivan and Tsar Pyotr in a way that the Streltsy could see them. This action calmed the angry agitation that dominated the Streltsy. Some of them climbed the balcony by placing ladders and wanted to make sure whether he was the real prince and that he was alive. The Streltsy, who were convinced that the prince was real, soon understood that they had been deceived and that the rumors were false⁴⁰.

Matveyev, who had previously been greatly liked by the Streltsy, began to address the crowd gathered in the Kremlin. Matveyev's speech of persuasion was effective on the Streltsy, and many among them expressed that he was defending them before the tsar. After this, the deceived and agitated crowd began to disperse. However, at that very moment, the men of Princess Sofia, who placed several barrels of wine in the square, soon began to make the Streltsy, who lost their consciousness, drink⁴¹. Under the influence of the alcohol they had consumed, as the Streltsy lost control, an unexpected figure appeared on the scene: Mihail Dolgorukiy, the minister responsible for the Streltsy, who no longer had any authority over them. He delivered that unfortunate speech which would cost both his own life and the lives of many others. Accusing the Streltsy of being rebellious, the minister ordered them to disperse to their homes immediately. The crowd, driven by anger and recalling the prince's former harshness, threw him from the balcony onto the spears of those gathered below, where he was killed. Matveyev suffered a similar fate; after being thrown from the balcony onto the spears below, his body was dragged to the market square⁴².

³⁷ Полевой 1843, 58.

³⁸ Бринкер 1882, 29.

³⁹ Устрялов 1858, 31.

⁴⁰ Богословский 1940, 43.

⁴¹ Петров 1872, 16.

⁴² Бергман 1840, 49.



Fig. 1: V. Dmitriev-Orenburgskiy Nikolay 1682 "Rebellion of Streltsy"⁴³

Having already brutally killed two people, the Streltsy shouted that *it was time to determine who they needed*, and stormed the palace, beginning to search the rooms. The Streltsy, who were searching everywhere for their victims, when they found someone from the list in their hands, beat them without allowing them to defend themselves or speak; afterward, they carried the person to the balcony and showed them to the crowd waiting below, asking whether *it was good*. When the crowd said *good, good*, they were thrown from the balcony onto the spears below. The Streltsy, who could not get enough satisfaction from the killings, also did not refrain from mocking the dead and the wounded; while the victims were being taken to the balcony, they mockingly announced their arrival to the crowd below⁴⁴. Among those killed on the first day of the uprising were A. S. Matveyev, F. P. Saltikov, who was mistakenly killed instead of the tsarina's brother Ivan Kirilovič, the tsarina's other brother Afanasiy Kirilovič, the commander of the Chigirin campaign G. G. Romodanovskiy, the boyar I. M. Yazıkov, the дума clerk Larion Ivanon, and others⁴⁵.

On May 15, the Streltsy, who searched for their victims in the Kremlin throughout the day according to the list in their hands, withdrew to their barracks at sunset after leaving guards in the Kremlin. On the morning of May 16, they again entered the palace accompanied by the same shouts and kettledrums and demanded that Ivan Kirilovič

⁴³ The painting depicts that critical turning point during the 1682 Streltsy Uprising, when the young Petro was shown to the enraged crowd by his mother, Tsarina Natalya. The painter Dmitriyev-Orenburgskiy masterfully reflects the brutality of the spear-bearing rebels pressing up to the palace stairs and the terror experienced by the child Petro, thereby documenting the bloody conflict between Russia's "old" and "new" order. This traumatic event is regarded as the fundamental psychological motivation behind the modern army and absolutist system of governance that Petro would later establish.

⁴⁴ Хмыров 1863, 40.

⁴⁵ Хмыров 1863, 40.

Narişkin, the tsarina's brother and Pyotr's maternal uncle, be handed over to them. Otherwise, they threatened to kill all the boyars. Despite all these threats, the Streltsy, unable to obtain Ivan, left the palace at noon after once again leaving guards everywhere. The next day, that is, on the morning of May 17, the Streltsy returned to the palace and this time declared that they would not leave the Kremlin without taking Ivan Narişkin⁴⁶. Realizing that the appropriate moment for her own policy had arrived, Princess Sofia personally made the following appeal to Tsarina Natalia: *Your brother cannot escape from the Streltsy, and we cannot die in his place*. Likewise, the frightened boyars also, in tears, begged the tsarina to hand over her brother⁴⁷.



Fig. 2: A. İ. Korzhin, 1682 "Rebellion of Streltsy"⁴⁸

Unable to endure any longer in the face of the instigations of vengeful Sofia and the persistent demands of the Streltsy, the tsarina agreed to hand over her brother Ivan Narişkin with her own hands. The tsarina took her brother from the church where he was hiding and handed him over to the rebellious Streltsy⁴⁹. The Streltsy, who seized Ivan from the lap of the tsarina, dragged him down the stairs by his hair and, after taking

⁴⁶ Соловьёв 1895, 901-902.

⁴⁷ Сахаров (ред.) 1841, 29; Григорович 1860, 27.

⁴⁸ Aleksey İvanoviç Korzuhin's painting, dated 1882, depicts one of the most horrifying moments of the 1682 Streltsy Uprising, namely the murder of Petro's maternal uncle, Boyar Afanasiy Narişkin, inside a church within the Kremlin. In the work, this act of brutality, which took place before the eyes of the young Petro and his mother Tsarina Natalya, left in Petro's mind a lifelong hatred of the "old order" and an obsession with security. By portraying the bloody execution within the dim atmosphere of the church and the helplessness of the royal family, Korzuhin presents this chaotic turning point in Russian history with dramatic realism. As the Streltsy dragged Ivan Narişkin out of the palace, the young Petro witnessed the events while at the same time trying to console his mother, whereas Princess Sofia observed what was happening with satisfaction.

⁴⁹ Петров 1872, 17.

him through the Kremlin, brought him to the Konstantinov torture house. Despite all the torture inflicted upon him, the prince did not answer any questions; from there they took him to Red Square and, with the axes in their hands, he was executed in a particularly brutal manner. Believing that they had completed the death list in their hands with their final victim, the Streltsy dispersed to their barracks. As they were leaving: *Now we are satisfied, may God grant health to the tsar. Let him deal with the rest, we are ready and content to die for him, for the two rulers, for the prince and for the tsarina.* Then they dispersed to their barracks. In the evening, permission was granted for the burial of those who had been killed, but as the condition of the bodies made identification extremely difficult⁵⁰.

The 1682 Uprising demonstrates that violence was not only a consequence but also a fundamental instrument used in the redistribution of power. The Streltsy, mobilized through propaganda, rumor, and mass manipulation, effectively altered the balance of power within the Kremlin and prepared the ground for the redefinition of political legitimacy through force.

Sofia's Power and the New Balance of Power

At the end of the three-day bloody uprising, the Naryshkins group had been almost completely eliminated. Tsarina Natalia had been left alone with her young son Pyotr, without any defense against possible dangers⁵¹. These bloody days produced many losers, but the sole winners were Princess Sofia and the Miloslavskys⁵². It seemed that the Streltsy were not content with merely reshaping power in Russia through a bloody uprising. A few days later, representatives of the Streltsy who reappeared at the palace informed the court that they wanted both brothers to rule, with the elder Ivan as the first tsar and the younger Pyotr as the second tsar. Upon the demand of the Streltsy, the council that was convened decided that the proposed request was reasonable, that having two tsars would be better, and that when one of them went on campaign, the other could govern the country. According to the decision taken on May 26, the country would be ruled by two tsars: Ivan would be the elder and first tsar, and Pyotr would be the younger and second tsar. With the announcement of these decisions throughout Moscow, the Streltsy were given meals at the palace every day, two regiments at a time. After the issue of the two tsars was announced to the public, the Streltsy, due to Pyotr's young age and Ivan's illness, demanded that Princess Sofia also rule the country together with Natalia Naryshkina. This demand and news were conveyed to Sofia; although she appeared reluctant, she gladly accepted power and the title of ruler, for with this all her hidden ambitions had been fulfilled⁵³.

Preparations for the enthronement ceremonies of Ivan and Pyotr lasted for about a month, because there were not two sets of the symbols of sovereignty—such as crowns and scepters—available, and such a situation had not been encountered before⁵⁴. The coronation ceremonies of Tsars Ivan and Pyotr were held on June 25 in the Uspenskiy Cathedral. For the coronation ceremony, which was prepared in a manner different from the usual, two thrones, two crowns, two scepters of rule, and one kaftan each were

⁵⁰ Устрялов 1858, 39-40.

⁵¹ Бергман 1840, 52.

⁵² Валишевский 2005, 37.

⁵³ Чистякова 1875, 41-42.

⁵⁴ Петров 1872, 18.

prepared. Power had been arranged through the foresight of Sofia and the will of the Streltsy. Afterwards, it was time to reward the heroes of this success. On May 19, the Streltsy who came to the palace demanded that 240,000 rubles be paid to them. Sofia generously rewarded the Streltsy. While the Streltsy received ten rubles per person, they also seized the property of the victims. It was permitted that the prices of the goods left by the deceased be reduced and that they be bought and sold at low value only by the Streltsy. As a sign of the service they had rendered, a stone column was erected in Red Square for the Streltsy, whose name had been changed to palace guards. In return for these services, the Streltsy were exempted from many of their obligations: their salaries were increased, their duration of duty in the cities was reduced by one year, tax amnesty was granted, and it was forbidden for commanders to employ the Streltsy in their own personal work or to physically punish them without the permission of the tsar⁵⁵.



Fig. 3: V. P. Vereşagin, "Tsars Ivan and Petr Alekseyevich, Ruler Sofia Alekseyevna 1682-1689"⁵⁶

The disappointment of Princess Sofia, for whom the path to power had been opened on the grounds of Ivan's illness and Pyotr's young age, did not take long to emerge. Although from the outside it appeared that Sofia and her entourage had secured power, this power rested upon and there were centers of power upon which it rested and which shared in it. The victory had been achieved with the help of the Streltsy army, which had

⁵⁵ Григорович 1860, 27-28; Валишевский, 2005, 37.

⁵⁶ This engraving reflects, through a symbolic composition, the dual tsardom and the de facto structure of power that emerged after the 1682 Moscow Crisis. While Ivan and Pyotr, depicted together at the center, represent formal authority, the more prominent and dominant positioning of Sofya Alekseyevna on the left indicates that real power was concentrated in her hands. This hierarchical arrangement within the work constitutes an important element of propaganda and representation, expressing the political reality of the period through a visual language.

become unruly. This force, which had managed the tsarist crown, soon began to see itself as the sole master of the situation. At the head of this army was I. A. Hovanskiy, who had replaced Y. A. Dolgoruki, who had been killed during the Streltsy uprising, and had been appointed minister responsible for the Streltsy. In the summer of 1682, power was entirely in his hands, and he was able to regulate authority together with the Streltsy. During this period, Hovanskiy assumed a full intermediary role between Sofia and the army; just as they had previously done to Tsarina Natalia, the Streltsy dictated their own will and demands to Sofia through Hovanskiy. Sofia soon realized in whose hands real power actually lay and how unreliable a support the Streltsy were for her⁵⁷.

Sofia had obtained power by relying on the arms of the Streltsy, but there were also other groups that intended to rely on the same force. These were the raskolniks, a religious group⁵⁸. The recent success of the Streltsy had greatly encouraged them⁵⁹. The opponents of Nikon, who made certain changes in the traditional prayer books, were called raskolniks. Despite the pressures and punishments imposed upon them, they persistently defended their ideas. After learning about the disorder in Moscow during the time of Tsar Fedor, the weakness of the government, and the conflicts within the dynasty following the tsar's death, the raskolniks considered this moment as the most suitable time to spread their views. Rapidly making their presence felt in the city, the raskolniks boldly began to discuss the harmful effects of the innovations and attempted

⁵⁷ Богословский 1940, 46.

⁵⁸ Труайя 2007, 15; Старообрядчество-Древлеправославие-Раскольники, Raskolniki: The designation given to the adherents of the old faith who did not accept the reforms carried out by Patriarch Nikon in the church, especially in the sphere of worship, during the reign of Tsar Aleksey Mihaylovič and with his support. These church reforms were implemented between 1650 and 1680, and those who opposed them were excommunicated at the Moscow Council of 1656. Because these reforms led to divisions within the Russian Church, the term *raskolnik* was derived from the Russian word *raskol* (раскол), meaning division or fragmentation, thus referring to those who were divided or split. The term *raskolnik* was prohibited from use in everyday speech and official documents during the reign of Catherine II in 1783, and from 1788 onward the term "old ritualists" (*staroobradtsi*) began to be used instead. Those who did not accept the reforms began to appear in different parts of Russia. The raskolniks refused to renounce their faith, disregarding translation errors from Greek into Russian and ambiguities in the texts, and insisted on maintaining the old rites against the new church. While defending their old laws, the raskolniks pronounced the name of God not as "Iisus," as it was written and read in the new rites, but in the form "Ísus," as they had learned before. The raskolniks, who demanded that the "salavats" be performed not three times but twice during prayers, condemned those who made the sign of the cross with three fingers according to the new practice to God's curse and accepted that it should be done with two fingers. Avoiding the new churches with horror, the raskolniks referred to priests as "pigs" The raskolniks, who were present in different regions of Russia, formed associations among themselves with a common purpose in order to oppose the authority of the official church. Some of them slept in cemeteries, others punished each other by beating with wood. Others condemned themselves to permanent exile or silence, while some members confined themselves with their entire families inside their homes. Those who went even further filled their houses with straw and set them on fire, believing that they would go to heaven through the prayers recited as they burned to death.

⁵⁹ Тихомиров 1905, 33.

to arouse an interest in religion among the people⁶⁰. The dangerous aspect of the matter was that there was a considerable number of raskolniks among the Streltsy. For Hovanskiy, who was at the head of the Streltsy, was close to the raskolniks as a supporter of the old faith⁶¹.

Prince Hovanskiy was not a very intelligent man, but he regarded himself as highly superior, was extremely fond of fame and glory, and wanted to rule everyone. That the Streltsy were an important force in these days Hovanskiy, who was aware of this, encouraged them to stand behind the old faith. One of the most prominent orators among the raskolniks was Nikita; he was known as a bold, coarse, talkative, and deceitful memorizer, and he was one of the leading defenders of this matter. Hovanskiy trusted and believed greatly in Nikita's knowledge and statements. Nikita, making use of his influence over Hovanskiy, persistently invited, through him, the patriarch to a debate on religion in Red Square in front of the clergy and all the people. Hovanskiy also supported this idea, for it was not difficult to achieve a victory through brute force⁶².

The raskolniks, thanks to Hovanskiy, achieved the debate environment they desired, and the religious debate between the bishops and the raskolniks took place on July 5 in the Kremlin. Sofia, who permitted the debates, requested that the final discussions be held in her presence. The entire palace, the tsarinas, the patriarch, and high-ranking clergymen gathered to listen to the complaints of the raskolniks⁶³. On the appointed day for the debate, Nikita-Pustosvat gathered all his followers and, after performing a prayer ceremony according to raskolnik customs, moved toward the Kremlin together with a large group of Streltsy and people. Nikita himself advanced at the front holding an eight-pointed cross, while his followers moved behind him with old icons, old books, and fervent recitations. People gathered from all sides, and a large crowd filled the Kremlin. Climbing to a high place, Nikita, on the one hand, called the people to the old faith, and on the other hand directed harsh criticisms at the new faith, the clergy, and the new church⁶⁴.

Foreseeing the intentions of the crowd gathered outside, the patriarch organized a religious service in order to bring the uprising to an end. The patriarch then sent a priest to enlighten the assembled crowd and to distribute to the people a written paper in which Nikita's errors, which he had denied during the time of Tsar Aleksey Mihaylovič, were declared⁶⁵. The priest sent by the patriarch narrowly escaped being stoned to death. Forced by curses and threats, the patriarch, fearing a repetition of the events of May, fled from the church to the palace to seek refuge⁶⁶. Meanwhile, Hovanskiy, who immediately intervened, tried to persuade Sofia to recall the patriarch to the square and to calm the crowd. However, when Sofia decided to receive the leaders of the Streltsy in the presence of high-ranking clergy, Hovanskiy managed at the last moment to call his followers into the hall. The raskolniks, who were able to enter at the last moment, encountered an unexpected scene; the space of sovereignty was filled with women.

⁶⁰ Погодин 1875, 63.

⁶¹ Григорович 1860, 29.

⁶² Тихомиров 1905, 33.

⁶³ Бринкер 1882, 42-43.

⁶⁴ Тихомиров 1905, 34.

⁶⁵ Погодин 1875, 71.

⁶⁶ Ламбин 1843, 69.

Tsarina Sofia and her aunt Tatyana were seated on the throne, while somewhat below them, at a lower level, Tsarina Natalia Naryshkina, the princess, and the patriarch were seated. To their right sat the clergy, and to their left sat other high-ranking state officials and selected leaders of the Streltsy. The attention of Sofia, Patriarch İokim, and the other boyars was focused solely on the Streltsy; the raskolniks, who had been able to enter by force at the last moment, at Nikita's command, their books opened their books, placed the icons around, and while lighting their candles, they ignored the high-ranking clergy who were present⁶⁷.



Fig. 4: Vasily Perov, Nikita Pustosvyat: A Dispute over Faith⁶⁸

The raskolniks, who entered in a manner that was hardly acceptable, were addressed by Tsarina Sofia with several questions: why had they come, why had they entered the tsarist palace in such an insolent and coarse manner like adherents of a godless foreign faith? How did they dare to provoke unrest among the people by spreading their nonsense in the squares? In response to Tsarina Sofia's question, Nikita stated that they had come to request that the sacred books be reconsidered and that the rites be restored to their former state, as in the time of Tsar Mihail Fedoroviç. The patriarch, replying to Nikita's intervention, said that they did not understand grammar and that nothing had been added to the sacred books by them⁶⁹. Nikita not only defended his arguments with heated expressions, but went even further and attempted to strike Afanasiy, the bishop of Holmogor, who was present there, with the cross in his hand. During the scuffle that broke out from within the crowd, shouts were heard targeting not the patriarch but

⁶⁷ Труайя 2007, 16; Тихомиров 1905, 34.

⁶⁸ This painting reflects, in the context of the events of 1682, the politicization of religious debates and the raskolnik movement through a highly striking scene. The heated discussion among the clergy at the center of the composition and the chaotic condition of the surrounding crowd demonstrate that religious division had turned into a social crisis. The depiction of Sofya Alekseyevna in the background with a calm and dominant posture implies that these religious tensions were also being used as an instrument in the struggle for political power.

⁶⁹ Чистякова 1875, 52.

Sofia: The time for you to withdraw into a monastery has long come, let complete peace come to the country!⁷⁰.

After the tension of the environment and the threats that were hurled, Tsarina Sofia wanted to end the debate and have Nikita arrested, but fearing a possible popular uprising, she ended the discussion by giving the excuse that it was late and promising that they would continue later⁷¹. The raskolniks who left the palace celebrated in the streets what they claimed to be their victory over the patriarch and the other clergymen, while the people dispersed without fully understanding what had happened. Sofia, who summoned to her presence the commanders of the Streltsy regiments already present in the palace, reminded them of their former loyalty to the tsardom and shamed them for the ignorance in which they now found themselves. She then promised that they would again be rewarded for their loyalty, to which the Streltsy replied in unison: We do not support the old faith, this is not our business, this is the matter of the patriarch and the church. The selected Streltsy were given money and wine at a level that would satisfy them. Having received these generous rewards, the Streltsy ran through the streets declaring that they did not defend the old faith, and they killed the raskolniks they captured, describing them as rebels who incited the people. Their main target was Nikita; that very night they captured him as well and executed him without any trial⁷².

Tsarina Sofia had prepared the Streltsy and the raskolniks for rebellion in order to achieve her aim, but the allies with whom she had acted together until recently no longer recognized her authority. Hovanski had become stronger than Miloslavski and had begun to pose a threat to the tsarina. The killing of Nikita did not bring a definitive success to the government, nor did it diminish Hovanski's influence. Hovanski's power in Moscow was great, and the raskolniks regarded him as their representative and political leader. Although his last attempt had failed, it greatly served to bring the raskolniks together more tightly around him. The raskolniks, who showed serious loyalty to him, called him "father," and when he walked, they ran behind him shouting "the exalted one is coming"⁷³.

Sofia now had to find real support from a different segment of society against the Streltsy, who had become an open threat to her, and their leader Hovanski. Sofia found the support she was seeking among the native feudal lords upon whom the Romanovs had relied from the very beginning. Aware of the difficulty of the situation in which she found herself in Moscow, Sofia, on August 19, took the two young tsars with her and first went from Moscow to the village of Kolomenskoe, and from there reached the Troitskiy Monastery. Landowners in the nearby provinces were urgently summoned to appear before the tsarina. In response to this call, cavalry regiments began to gather from everywhere, and when the number of cavalymen was sufficient, Sofia ordered the capture of Hovanski and his execution without any trial⁷⁴. After Hovanskiy was captured by order of Sofia, his son was also captured and the charges against them were read. Although the Streltsy took up arms to avenge Hovanskiy, they did not dare to go

⁷⁰ Бергман 1843, 56; Труайя 2007, 16.

⁷¹ Григорович 1860, 33.

⁷² Чистякова 1875, 54-55.

⁷³ Шебальский 1856, 59-60.

⁷⁴ Богословский 1940, 47.

to the Troitse-Sergiev Monastery where Sofia and her entourage had taken refuge⁷⁵. The Streltsy, after this defeat, asked to be pardoned by the tsarina. After a few among them were executed, the rest were pardoned under certain conditions. The Streltsy, who swore that they would henceforth be loyal servants of the government, themselves demolished the monument they had erected in Red Square in honor of their success during the bloody days of May, and the title of palace guards that had been given to them in memory of those days was also withdrawn. In place of Hovanskiy, that is, at the head of the Streltsy, Şalovitiy, who was entirely loyal to Sofia, was appointed. After the issue of the Streltsy had been completely resolved for Sofia, she and the members of the court returned to Moscow on November 6⁷⁶.

After Tsarina Natalia Naryshkina, who was outside Moscow with Sofia and her entourage, left the leadership in administration to Sofia, she did not immediately leave the Kremlin. The tsarina, who spent the winter of 1682–1683 in the Kremlin, stayed for a short time in the village of Kolomensk in February together with Pyotr. With the arrival of spring, the tsarina and her family left the Kremlin on May 6 to go to the village of Vorobyevo, where they spent a significant part of the summer. During the days when Pyotr remained away from the Kremlin, he came to Moscow only for religious ceremonies and state rituals (Bogoslovskiy 1940, 48). Having thus managed to rid herself of one of the tsars, a large part of the Streltsy, and the leading figures of the raskolniks, Sofia was now ready and willing to govern the country together with her favorite Vasilij Golitsin. Sofia's close circle compared her to the Babylonian Semiramis or to the English queen Elizabeth. Paying little attention to the two children whom she had placed on the throne under her own shadow, Sofia wanted to be addressed with titles such as Your Majesty or the one who gives life to God, expressions associated with the Virgin Mary, and holy tsarina. At official receptions, Sofia, who sat beside Ivan, commissioned an engraving from the Netherlands depicting herself with the Monomakh cap⁷⁷.

Although Sofia's seizure of power appeared to be a successful coup, the fragility of the forces upon which this power rested soon became evident. Unable to act independently in the face of the Streltsy and their leaders, Sofia was forced to share power, and this situation led to the emergence of a multi-centered and unstable model of governance in the Russian political structure.

Conclusion

The Moscow Crisis of 1682 represents a complex struggle for power that cannot be reduced to a mere dynastic conflict or palace coup. The politicization of the streltsy, the ideological mobilization of the Old Believers, and the rivalry among court factions collectively revealed the fragility of state authority in late seventeenth-century Russia. Although Sofya Alekseyevna's rise to power was made possible through the strategic use of these forces, the unstable balance upon which her authority rested exposed the limits of governance based on fragmented power structures. In this sense, the crisis not only demonstrated the vulnerability of the existing political order but also highlighted the necessity of reasserting centralized authority. The reforms implemented under Peter I can therefore be understood as a response to these structural weaknesses,

⁷⁵ Чернова 2006, 144.

⁷⁶ Тихомиров 1905, 40; Соловьёв 1895, 929.

⁷⁷ Труайя 2007, 18.

aiming to establish a more controlled and cohesive system of governance. In the longer term, these developments also contributed to shaping Russia's expanding geopolitical orientation toward the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. More broadly, the events of 1682 illustrate that political legitimacy in early modern Russia emerged not from a single source, but from the dynamic interaction and contestation among military, religious, and courtly actors.

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