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THE COLOR REVOLUTION PHENOMENON: FROM CLASSICAL THEORY TO UNPREDICTABLE PRACTICES

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Between 2003 and 2005, a relatively new trend—the transformation of political regimes in some of the Soviet successor states, coined in political science as “velvet revolution”—became obvious in the post-Soviet expanse. The normally evolutionary dynamics of regime changes were moving at an accelerated pace toward the use of force, which echoed across the post-Soviet territory. The term “revolution” was applied to several interconnected events, starting with the dissatisfaction of a large number of citizens with the elections and their results produced by the government’s interference in the form of

abuse of the administrative resource and cheating; the losers’ ability to mobilize the discontented voters; and encouragement from Western leaders and the public, which made it impossible to use force against the rallies, and ending with the opposition coming to power after a series of mass street actions.

In the past, the expert community believed there were various reasons why Central Asia was less prone to fall victim to this phenomenon than Georgia and Ukraine. The events of March 2005 in Kyrgyzstan and of May 2005 in Uzbekistan demonstrated that the velvet revolution phenom-

enon was spreading far and wide and that it may destabilize all the other Central Asian countries. Recent developments have taught us that socio-political destabilization may develop into a protracted and unpredictable process.

Obviously the phenomenon calls for theoretical investigation, whereby the results

should be compared with reality and common political, social, economic, and geopolitical repercussions identified. An analysis of the “revolutionary regime change” in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine makes it possible to provide a certain theoretical explanation of the phenomenon.

Velvet Revolutions: Similarities and Differences

The phenomenon of the “revolutionary” regime change in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine brings to mind the velvet revolutions of 1989 in Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and some other countries. There, and in the three post-Soviet states, the political regimes were changed, but the velvet revolutions in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine differed, for objective reasons, from the East European phenomenon: the development process and the desired aims were different. In Eastern Europe, the velvet revolutions developed, on the whole, according to the classical pattern of genesis and revolutionary aims not limited to a regime change; they aimed at deep-cutting and overall transformation of the state and social order.

Significantly, the use of the “revolutionary” metaphor points not merely to the similarity, but also to the genetic kinship of these phenomena. They are part of a certain logical regularity, resistance to which looks less like “maintaining law and order and the continuity of power” and much more like a conservative response to the “relentless course of history.” More than that: as a “revolutionary” phenomenon, the process has acquired a wide range of descriptions suggested by the metaphor.¹

The events that took place in the three Soviet successor states should be regarded solely as a form of coup d'état that made wider use of certain revolutionary technologies. Their mass nature and the relatively peaceful transfer (seizure) of power are shared elements.

A genuine revolution is a much larger and much more radical form of political and social change. The post-Soviet states, however, demonstrate a rotation of bureaucratic elites presented as democratic change. This means that we are witnessing a gradual redistribution of power in favor of certain political groups, the members of which until recently belonged to the same ruling elite.

In fact, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine (and Serbia before them) became the testing ground for a qualitatively new form of regime change: the elite vs. counter-elite confrontation on the domestic political scene reached a critical point and, actively encouraged from the outside, developed into a public conflict devoid of any ideological overtones typical of the traditional revolutionary processes.²

The changes were predated by a long period during which protest potential accumulated, caused by the complex diffusion of interaction in the power-society system, economic difficulties, and other negative phenomena. This intensified the conflict inside the ruling elite itself. To an even greater extent, however, the opposition elite groups with limited access to power used this potential as a pressure tool.

¹ See: B.V. Mezhuiev, “‘Oranzhevaia revoliutsia’: vosstanovlenie konteksta,” *Polis*, No. 5, 2006, p. 75.

² T. Poliannikov, G. Prokopov, “Sindrom ‘tsvetykh revoliutsiy,’” *Svobodnaia mysl-XXI*, No. 6, 2005, p. 148.

From this it follows that the thesis of the velvet revolutions' democratic nature should be regarded as a surrogate used to fill in the ideological vacuum, a usual feature of the confrontations between elites and their support groups. In fact, the velvet revolutions discredit democracy: elections as its central mechanism and their results are contested to generate a coup. This is spreading far and wide to become a frequently used practice. Without this, no wide popular support is possible: to mobilize its latent and inert discontent society needs ideological justification.

The revolutionary process can be managed from both inside and outside: objectively speaking, this can be described as one of the central and very specific factors. Together with domestic political groups, certain external forces are interested in developing manageable dynamics of such processes based on the widest possible use of political technologies (in the context of manipulating public consciousness and the changed balance of forces).

The wide-scale revolutionary scenarios of regime change translated into reality in Ukraine, Georgia and, to a lesser extent, in Kyrgyzstan have demonstrated that they were realized with the aim of imposing a system of manageable democracy on them in which foreign factors play the key role.³

Manageability proved to be limited since the external and internal forces involved in the process can do nothing more than generate (with the help of political technologies) a quasi-revolutionary upsurge rooted in a wide range of basic factors. This upsurge starts the process of evolutionary development according to the "revolution's" own rules, which merely need to be trimmed. In this way, the velvet revolution differs from the endogenous (created by internal reasons) classical revolution.

In fact, manageability of the revolutionary process realized from inside and outside the country demonstrates that pre-revolutionary moods are not indispensable. In the absence of objective prerequisites, consistent and purposeful implementation of corresponding tools and skilful management of society alone can bring tension to a critical level.

The above suggests that manipulating mass consciousness in the process of artificially created domestic political crises is one of the key constants of the velvet revolutions of the new wave. Revolutionary manipulation of collective consciousness does not use newly discovered social and psychological prerequisites: it relies on those already existing (lack of confidence in the government, override political changes, etc.). Arguments are of secondary importance in such cases: it is more than enough to bring into play the emotional subconscious potential by initiating an emotional upsurge.

In classical revolutions, individual and collective emotions and psychology are also important, but the emotional and psychological impact does not develop into a chaotic and widespread sociopolitical performance: in classical cases it results from a gradual process, in the course of which the level of all-embracing social tolerance is exceeded. In velvet revolutions, on the other hand, manipulative mechanisms of internal and external impact are used to stir up the masses and provoke society, or part of it, into opposing the government. This is done by deliberately heating up latent discontent that has not yet reached its critical level.

The velvet revolutions have become a specific and highly effective tool of geopolitical rivalry; destabilization of the opponent's zone of influence is achieved by establishing control over the state selected for this purpose. These are the distinguishing features of the phenomenon of velvet revolutions in the post-Soviet expanse. To a certain extent they may be described using a somewhat modified formula of political transformation: "replacement," that is, a relatively quick transfer of power from one elite group to another in the midst of a political crisis.

³ See: T. Carothers, "The Backlash against Democracy Promotion," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006.

One more important aspect should be mentioned: the open legitimization at the international level, with the direct involvement of foreign forces, of a velvet change in regimes that contradict international law. Whereby this legitimization predates the revolution itself. Consistent recognition of the legitimacy of the gradually intensifying process that uses force to depose constitutional power should be regarded as an indirect threat at the international level and not just something limited to national proportions.

This is confirmed by the fact that official U.S. circles look at the Color Revolutions as part of a democratic process leading to freedom. They tend to use the local terms—Rose Revolution, Orange Revolution—to refer to these developments; they do not hesitate to apply the term “revolution” to the Color Revolutions. During a visit to Central Asia, Condoleezza Rice described the events in Kyrgyzstan as an inordinate and exceptional revolution.⁴

What Causes Velvet Revolutions

Velvet revolutions are a phenomenon limited to the developing states at the transition stage, where objective and subjective situations create and stimulate crises.

The following can be described as factors conducive to a revolutionary situation:

- An economic crisis and wide gap between the poor and the rich;
- A politically weak government unable to control the political, social, and economic situation in the country;
- A split in the ruling elite that produces a counter-elite;
- A strong opposition supported to a considerable extent by society, and a widespread NGO system;
- A low level of public confidence, or its complete loss.

The above creates a context in which a revolutionary situation may take shape and unfold; in fact, just a few of these factors are enough.

Economic crisis. Social and economic difficulties that squelch public expectations and send up the number of unemployed, along with the number of those living below the poverty level (which was especially obvious in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan), are the main causes of social and political tension. Unequal economic development of the industrial branches leads to uneven distribution of profit, which in turn leads to considerable social stratification and social inequality. The steadily widening gap between the poorest and richest groups does not allow a middle class (the basis of society’s stability) to appear and develop. Unequal distribution of profit at the regional level produces a pitfall of separatism, while the elite might start dividing into regional groups.

This is one of the key factors that, being charged with tension and conflict potential, might lead to a revolutionary situation. Driven by their social and economic demands, the discontented masses pour into the streets.

The depressed districts, small towns, socially vulnerable population groups, etc. constitute the main problem areas and factors of the state’s socioeconomic sphere, which might contribute to a revolutionary situation.

It should be said that social and economic problems should be treated as priorities: if the standard of living continues deteriorating latent discontent may trigger active protests.

⁴ See: V.A. Barsamov, “‘Tsvetnye revoliutsii’: teoreticheskiy i prikladnyy aspekty,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*, No. 8, 2006, p. 63.

Politically weak government. Many ruling regimes fell because their political systems lost their structural strength. A politically weak government unable to control the political, social, and economic situation may create a revolutionary situation. This happened in Kyrgyzstan, where the leaders proved obviously unprepared to use force to dispel the rallies and neutralize the opposition, while the weak power-related structures proved unable to oppose the crowds. This resulted in anarchy and chaos in the republic.

In addition, monopolized power, which reduced the democratic procedures to a mere formality unable to act within the legal limits to change power, was responsible for the development of such a situation. Indeed, society cannot do much under such conditions: it can only put direct pressure on the leaders. Force remains the only tool in a country where there is no legal procedure of power change, where corruption reigns at all levels, and where alternative regulatory sources are practically non-existent. The absence of regular channels of “power-society” interaction leaves power impotent.

Under a weak government, the most important and urgent national issues degenerate into collisions conducive to higher tension and multiplying “problem issues” in all spheres of social life.

Protest and separatist sentiments, disunited regions, mounting ethnic contradictions, and centrifugal trends create the most hazardous “problem issues” fraught with irreversible crises.

A weak government splits the elite; political parties are crystallized, while the interests of the main political actors are polarized. The opposition uses relatively the weak government to strengthen its position as the only rational and active alternative to the people in power, who are gradually losing their grip.

Split in the ruling elite. A gap between the elite and counter-elite gradually develops under the mounting impact of their disagreements. The counter-elite, which accumulates considerable resources and political potential, develops into a serious opponent to become the moving force behind any velvet revolution.

Redistribution of power among the elite groups and fairly contradictory agreements among them inevitably cause a split and may lead to regionalism. In the final analysis, this destabilizes the political system. In Ukraine, for example, the central and regional elite reached agreements outside the legal frameworks; they achieved a bureaucratic consensus about their common interests regarding the election results and redistribution of resources, which produced vertical elite groups with central and regional components; the center’s clan interests were projected onto the regional level, while regional impact could be felt in the center. Then Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma’s inability to resolve the conflicts that repeatedly cropped up among the local oligarchs divided the core financial-industrial groups into two camps.

This led little by little to an alternative to those in power: in crisis, the alternative force became the moving force behind the velvet revolution.

Strong opposition and widespread NGO system. The split in the elite adds weight to the opposition, which may comprise some of the financial-industrial groups, part of the political establishment, and regional elites. In certain circumstances, this opposition supported by the masses may rally the core public and political forces and develop into a real alternative to the government.⁵

This means that networks of various oppositional organizations able to transform themselves into hierarchical structures and to lead the masses are critically important. In Ukraine, for example, it was the united opposition that advanced the revolutionary process, while its leaders’ support in the foreign media played an important role by creating an attractive image of the previously selected presidential candidate. In Georgia, where the economic and political crises had reached their peaks,

⁵ See: V.A. Barsamov, op. cit., p. 62.

Mikhail Saakashvili, leader of the National Movement opposition party, and Nino Burjanadze and Zurab Zhvania, who headed the Burjanadze-Democrats alliance, could be accepted as potential national leaders. A velvet revolution becomes possible if the opposition controls some of the power structures, which can be used to popularize its ideology across the country.

The NGOs funded from abroad are equally important for an unfolding revolutionary situation. In Ukraine, it was NGOs, the absolute majority of which operated on Western money, that supplied the velvet revolution with its social and organizational basis. In fact, they paid for the velvet revolution.

Lost confidence. The nation has no confidence in weak rulers and power structures; when people reject the ruling elite for moral reasons, the political situation becomes wobbly.

This happens when bureaucrats abuse their power or become too corrupt to look after the interests and observe the rights of the common people. Normally, the people do not trust, partly or completely, a government that has moved far away from them. Elections that faithfully mirror the public confidence level are the point of no return at which a revolution becomes possible.

In Georgia, for example, on the eve of the velvet revolution, about 75 percent of the nation had no confidence in President Shevardnadze. In March 2004 in Ukraine, the share of those who had no confidence in the government and the Supreme Rada exceeded the share of those who thought differently by 39 percent; in the case of the president, the figure was 41 percent. On the eve of the presidential election, Leonid Kuchma's popularity plummeted. In Kyrgyzstan, during and after the parliamentary elections, the level of President Akaev's job approval dropped to an impossibly low level, which triggered mass rallies and unrest.

In principle, a country in which the head of state is popular is immune to velvet revolutions, but we all know that manipulation of the election results and political technologies applied to public consciousness may change job approval ratings to a great extent.

A revolutionary situation develops if:

- The regime's social basis has narrowed down dramatically;
- The regime has lost its legitimacy;
- The political and economic elite organized into an opposition becomes aware of its impotence within the system;
- The opposition enjoys consolidated support of the world's leading powers;
- The ruling elite depends on the same powers;
- The capital and the largest cities display anti-government sentiments;
- There is a charismatic leader of the opposition who symbolizes change.

The above shows that if the main potentially critical circumstances develop, a velvet revolution becomes a reality; for objective and subjective reasons, however, ethnic, geographic, ecological, and other crisis-conducive factors may also become velvet revolution catalysts.

In the final analysis, social and political tension in any country is fed by a crisis of power accompanied by corruption in the center and periphery and financial swindling, antagonism between the government and society instigated by the widening gap between the rich and the poor, as well as economic instability that creates unemployment and poverty.

Left to accumulate, latent conflicts may increase tension; if a crisis develops, these conflicts may come out into the open and develop into a destructive force. This means that old social and state problems left to simmer for any reason may lead to velvet revolutions; pre-revolutionary situations lay bare such problems and bring them to the fore, where they add to the nascent crisis.

Velvet Revolutions: Genesis and Realization

An analysis of domestic political crises that develop into velvet revolutions suggests certain common regularities and a hierarchy of their elements. The events in Georgia, Ukraine, and, partly, Kyrgyzstan have revealed identical development patterns and mechanisms with which the coups were brought to fruition.

The following stages can be described as basic for all velvet revolutions.

- First stage. Deliberate worsening of the social and political situation.

This is a fairly prolonged period, especially if the ruling elite is strong enough. External and internal forces begin working on it several months before events (parliamentary or presidential elections in particular) that are hazardous for the ruling regimes.

Outside pressure mounts, while the opposition is actively rallying supporters. At this stage, political manipulation is widely used as the main tool for discrediting power and the state of affairs at home; political and social tension rises, while the image of the country's rulers is tarnished.

- Second stage. Building up tension to the maximum.

At the first signs of power disintegration and an ebb in its social support (which may happen for any reason), the destructive forces build up pressure on the government and society as parliamentary or presidential elections draw nearer.

Political manipulation of public opinion is replaced with psychological pressure that makes intensive use of the widest possible range of political technologies, the thesis about the malfunctioning government being the central one. Tension gradually reaches its peak as the election campaign unfolds.

- Third stage. A revolutionary upsurge.

It comes at the turning point; in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, it came when the election results were announced. The opposition relies on the existing social and political atmosphere and capitalizes on external pressure to create chaos and spontaneous developments by stirring up the masses.⁶

At this stage, discrediting the government is the counter-elite's main aim, achieved with the help of numerous facts of falsification of the election results presented as another batch of lies coming from above.

On the whole, the opposition steps up its activity to:

- Appeal against the election results on the strength of information supplied by "independent" and international organizations;
- Apply political and psychological pressure;
- Enlist considerable human resources within a very short period of time;
- Stage rallies under the slogan of revising the election results;
- Blockade state offices and strategic facilities.
- The opposition media provides information support.⁷

⁶ See: T. Poliannikov, G. Prokopov, op. cit., p. 152.

⁷ See: V.A. Barsamov, op. cit., p. 63.

The elements and mechanisms of velvet revolutions can be arranged in a conceptual complex, the particulars of which may vary from country to country depending on their specifics. We should bear in mind that the mechanisms and tools of revolutionary techniques are intertwined and synchronized, therefore they should be perceived as a single whole.

Political Manipulation

Internal and external forces resort to political manipulation to create a situation conducive to a velvet revolution. The government is discredited and deprived of its legitimacy during a stage-by-stage process that requires numerous intricate moves. The negative image of the government based on a misrepresentation of its actions, as well as far-fetched identification of the crisis with the people in power breed uncertainty among the masses and antipathy for the leaders, which becomes obvious by the time of a possible crisis (elections, etc.).

This tactic works well in marginalized politically passive or even indifferent societies known to shift their political loyalties unexpectedly and quickly; under careful coaching, which uses obviously populist slogans, they may become radicalized, producing large-scale and uncontrolled shifts in political balance.⁸

There are focal points, such as corruption, undemocratic nature, etc., that are most frequently used to discredit the ruling elite, which is unable, for objective reasons, to whitewash itself. The basically unproven facts of the top people's involvement in criminal acts (such as the murder of Georgy Gongadze in Ukraine, or the financial machinations in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan) are widely discussed, which forces the ruling elite to take the defensive.

We know that nearly all the members of the counter-elite in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan were connected with the government, which means that the opposition might have come to terms with certain members of the ruling elite (or deliberately created the illusion of such consent). This "paralyzes" power and deprives it of the ability to oppose (by using force among other things) the deepening political crisis. An analysis of the Ukrainian and Kyrgyz events reveals that the opposition relied on the regions with good results and that it tapped disagreements between the clans and groups to push the country's leaders into a narrow corner.

More often than not, the opposition in the three states took advantage of the absence of a charismatic figure in the ruling elite able to oppose, together with the head of state, the counter-elite. This allowed the opposition to concentrate on promoting its own leaders (Saakashvili, Nino Burjanadze, Iushchenko, Iulia Timoshenko, and Felix Kulov) as the only alternative. Much is said about their persistent efforts to check corruption in the higher echelons of the authoritarian government, even though some of them were part of this government directly involved in illegal proceedings.

Political manipulation during election campaigns forms a class of its own: the ruling elite is accused of falsifying the election results and never relieving its pressure on the opposition. In fact, the real state of affairs is unimportant: mud slinging creates a vast zone of public mistrust and hesitation; the nation's political ideas change in favor of the opposition.

The opposition takes recourse to subjective and, in fact, illegitimate methods—publication of preliminary election results, exit polls, and interviews with foreign observers—to support their allegations. Society, or a large part of it, rejects the official election results, while the government is forced onto the defensive.⁹

⁸ See: T.E. Grinberg, *Politicheskie tekhnologii. PR i reklama*, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2005.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

Protest actions against the election results are planned in advance, whereby the accent is placed on “peaceful” confrontation against the government. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that groups are being secretly trained for carrying out forceful opposition. The country’s leaders are driven into a dead end: the use of force is impossible as “anti-democratic” and detrimental to the ruling elite’s image—something that the opposition wanted from the very beginning.

By the final, post-election stage of a velvet revolution, the ruling elite has lost its resolve; it fails to formulate a clear strategy and remains passive under external and internal pressure. The opposition insists on a dialog, which inevitably leads to concessions and means that the government accepts the opposition’s demands and actions as legitimate. The ruling circles reveal their weakness; political balance is upturned, while the nation rejects the “discredited” leaders and is ready to overthrow them.

Manipulating Public and Personal Consciousness

Manipulation of public and personal consciousness is part of a wider technique of political manipulation used to discredit and demonize the ruling elite when applied in equal measure to the political and social spheres. In fact, the opposition never aspires to convince the nation that it (the opposition) is worthy of power. Its aim is different: it seeks to create a feeling of its sure victory and tries to convert the rising enmity toward the ruling figures into political assets of its own.

A mobilization strategy is highly effective: a “revolution” needs no full-fledged social basis. The destructive forces apply social and psychological manipulation to ignite a crisis; they use support bases for the purpose and draw passive social groups to their side. The youth, a large part of which has found itself at the social margins, has no stable political convictions, which makes it an obvious target of psychological and information pressure. In the absence of consistent patriotic and political education, young people easily succumb to radical ideas and become the core of velvet revolutions.

The older generation is another target of psychological pressure. Success comes relatively easily: older people are socially vulnerable and seek political action, so the opposition had no difficulty in recruiting their support, which the events in Georgia clearly demonstrated. On the whole, however, this group is fairly conservative in its political sympathies: to stir it up, objective (low living standards, etc.) rather than invented reasons are needed.¹⁰

People in the capitals and large regional centers constitute another target of political manipulation. In Georgia and Ukraine, the loyalty of the capitals helped to neutralize the government and limit its field of maneuver. Organized radical forces use these techniques to gain the approval of fairly large population groups in large cities (capitals). In some cases, the absence of enthusiasm can be replaced with indifference to the regime’s future.

The opposition applies all types of psychological manipulation and crowd control: populist slogans consistently yet wisely repeated to gain popularity, especially if popular discontent has objective causes.

For obvious reasons, populist slogans related to socioeconomic sores, national revival issues, uprooting corruption, etc. are especially welcome. The opposition presents itself as the only force capable of dealing with nearly all the problems. These slogans go well with the efforts to stir up social unrest and fan it: society learns to distrust the government and to accept a possible regime change.

¹⁰ See: V.A. Barsamov, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

It should be said that incited by populist slogans, people are ready to sacrifice their basic and long-term interests. In fact, the causes of such discontent vary from one social group to another; in some cases they are absolutely incompatible. Under very favorable conditions, the opposition manages to ignite even the privileged groups, which risk losing everything if the regime changes.

The “branding” technology is a tool of psychological manipulation. The counter-elite works hard to synchronize public consciousness by imposing behavioral and identification matrices on society as a form of fashionable behavior: external and internal forces employ psychological, semiotic, and other mechanisms to plant conscious and subconscious identification with the opposition and its aims in the minds of the people. This makes it much easier to plant political ideas later.

The genesis of velvet revolutions in the post-Soviet expanse demonstrates that political movements with short and eloquent names (Pora in Ukraine, Kmara in Georgia, etc.) help to synchronize public consciousness; symbols (the color orange or red carnations, etc.) play the same role. For some time the masses remain consolidated and euphoric. A short comprehensive slogan serves the same aim (“Down with Kuchma!” and the like).¹¹

Significantly, the opposition speaks in the name of the nation, which is presented as a single whole; it uses the effect of the masses, which works well during elections. The counter-elite vests its supporters with the right to speak in the name of society. In a socially marginalized and basically apolitical society, this causes a “chain reaction” of support, which is especially obvious if the government remains passive. This means that the willpower of the counter-elite is described as the willpower of the majority, which eventually begins to believe this. When it turns out that the opposition received between 20 and 30 percent of votes, the government is accused of falsifications, while the opposition’s victory is taken for granted.

Information and communication play a special role in manipulating public and personal consciousness. While tilling the soil for a future velvet revolution, the opposition uses a wide range of brainwashing channels (the Internet, foreign and domestic opposition media, etc.) to discredit the government and destabilize the political situation. The velvet revolutions in the Soviet successor states demonstrated that the state media, which dominate the market, could not prevent a landslide. People do not trust official information, especially if it distorts the truth.

Elections serve the starting point for mobilizing the already agitated masses: to initiate action, it is enough to declare that the election results were falsified. Against this background, a velvet revolution unfolds in great haste or is heated up by a series of new crises (this happened in Ukraine), which may urge the masses to go further.

The External Factor

This is the least studied factor because the expert community cannot agree on the role external actors play in velvet revolutions. A comprehensive analysis, however, has shown that external forces are either directly or indirectly involved in regime changes to shift the balance of forces in favor of the internal opposition.

To achieve this, external forces use the NGOs they have been supporting for some time, which can help the opposition forces or even become engaged in destructive activities inside the country. International NGOs and human rights organizations play a special role.

¹¹ See: T. Poliannikov, G. Prokopov, op. cit., p. 154.

By presenting themselves as vehicles of democracy and freedom, they intentionally or unintentionally shape popular moods accordingly. Their influence is not limited solely to consultative or educational aims; they extend financial and other aid to “democratic” (and radical) opposition structures. It should be said that certain states extend overall support to “democracy” at the official level, which primarily presupposes an elimination of “authoritarian” regimes.¹²

There is another effective tool. I have in mind continuous and strong direct external pressure through diplomatic and other channels under the pretext of inadequately developed democracy and an unacceptable political and economic situation. Officials, however, prefer indirect pressure, but, on the whole, official representatives of external forces (diplomats in particular) are actively involved in the pre-revolutionary hustle and bustle. This was especially obvious in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan.

Foreign actors readily extend information and propaganda support designed to promote “controlled democracy.” In fact, foreign information sources, the Internet, etc. add to the gradually increasing social and political chaos. Foreign forces help the opposition media in their propaganda efforts: money arrives through NGOs and official channels.

The institution of international observers that de facto deprives power of its legitimacy at the time of elections, thus supplying the pretext for a velvet revolution, was another popular tool widely used in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, where negative assessments of the elections by international observers and organizations justified the regime change.

Color Revolutions: From Theory to Practical Results

The recent events confirmed the obvious: velvet revolutions largely destabilize the social-political and economic spheres. Political power is restructured; new people move to the top and drive away what remained of the fallen regime. The post-revolutionary practices in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan confirmed that certain negative effects of the “democratic” revolutions are common to all countries. They can be systematized in the following way.

Domestic political and economic results:

- No strategic political landmarks are possible in the near future, while the political context remains vague;
- The political crisis may develop into a prolonged open conflict between the old and new elites;
- Centrifugal trends and separatist sentiments come to the fore together with an open or latent regional split;
- Protest sentiments and general social tension fraught with more conflicts are still smoldering;
- Former leaders are persecuted;
- Economic priorities are shifted;
- Property is re-divided among new elite groups.

Foreign policy results:

- A damaged status in international organizations caused by a shift in geopolitical sympathies;

¹² For more detail, see: M. Arstanov, “Menedzhery ‘barkhatnykh revoliutsiy’,” *Kontinent*, No. 3, 2005.

- Ruined relations with former strategic allies;
- Dependence on the countries that helped to carry out the velvet revolution.

On the whole, there is the danger that a velvet revolution might repeat itself at some point in future; this has been confirmed by post-Soviet experience.

In November 2006, in particular, Kyrgyzstan was drawn into another “revolution” that took a week to complete. On 2 November, the parliamentary opposition organized a mass rally in the country’s capital to protest against the president’s refusal to sign the draft constitution, under which some of the presidential powers should be transferred to the parliament (for instance, the parliament would receive the right to form the government). Those who supported the new document had no absolute majority needed to transform the draft into a law without the president’s approval. In the small hours of 8 November, the opposition deputies set up a Constituent Assembly that adopted the new Constitution. It was a coup d’état.

The country has lived through another successful coup in the last eighteen months. The concerted efforts of President Bakiev and Premier Kulov, the documents published to compromise the opposition, and rallies of pro-government supporters did not help. On 8 November, the draft was hastily signed. The public was informed that the sides had reached a compromise and that the president and the premier would remain in their posts until their terms expired. This and the haste with which the new Constitution was adopted were something out of the ordinary.

This time, the confrontation reached the point beyond which there was nothing but an open civil conflict; it was not easy to retreat from the brink: the sides involved had to save face and convince the allies that much had been done and that the opponent had been defeated.

The opposition may describe its struggle against President Bakiev as another round of “color revolution for the sake of democracy,” which might be accepted, since the conflict unfolded under the banner of a parliamentary republic. There is an a priori opinion that this form of governance is much better than presidential, which inevitably tends toward authoritarianism. It is commonly believed that a less corrupt parliament less biased toward nepotism is much better suited to rule. The parliamentary-presidential republic is accepted as a means of clipping presidential powers and redistributing some of the powers—and resources—among the majority of the elites. The sides, however, will never be satisfied—this will become obvious fairly soon. A document, even if this document is the Fundamental Law, and political realities (in a country where unlawful action is the usual way to seize power) are two different things. The struggle has just begun—those who count themselves the victors will try to wrench as much power from the unwilling president as possible.¹³

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The revolutionary events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan remain a mystery. The public is intrigued; conspiracies are suspected, myths are created. This is to be expected. On the one hand, the color (velvet or orange) revolutions have dramatically changed the format of the post-Soviet expanse. On the other, the speed of the changes and their scope have not yet allowed analysts to accumulate enough information to probe deeper into the revolutionary processes.¹⁴

We all know today that none of these revolutions produced the desired results—they were mere upsurges of public emotions that brought to power another elite that pursues the same aim: gaining access to the state’s finances and resources. Democracy was a mere rallying cry. The Color Revo-

¹³ See: S. Akimbekov, “Grom pobedy razdaetsia?” *Kontinent*, No. 22, 2006.

¹⁴ See: T. Poliannikov, G. Prokopov, op. cit., p. 158.

lutions are not so much a logical outcome of domestic political and social processes as a result of external pressure. The coups neither liberalized nor democratized the countries' political systems. In fact, after the revolution and regime change, aims and interests polarized to lead to political purges and splits. The Color Revolutions made the far from simple geopolitical realities even more complicated.

One thing has become absolutely clear: velvet revolutions have become a regime change tool that, when applied, brings domestic tension and instability to boiling point during general elections. The process hovers on the brink of the use of force and may end in an open confrontation beyond the main actors' control, while political developments may become unpredictable and irreversible. Post-Soviet experience has taught us that the classical political techniques of "democratic revolutions" fail to produce the desired effects: they lead to political destabilization, economic decline, and disillusionment.