

Russia and the “Orange Revolution”: Response, Rhetoric, Reality?

*Graeme P Herd **

Introduction

The Ukrainian presidential elections, which took place during November and December of 2004, have been labeled the “Orange Revolution.” Within former Soviet space, they have been interpreted as a Western-backed “exported revolution.” As such, these events are perceived to be part of a pattern of Western-backed revolutions stretching from Tirana and Belgrade to Tbilisi and Kiev, one that is now set to unfold in a tsunami-type chain reaction throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This article identifies the main arguments that support such a contention, questions its validity, and highlights key flaws and weaknesses in the assumptions that underpin it. It argues that the idea of Western-backed revolutions is so powerful that it has begun to shape foreign- and security-policy responses within the CIS, not least the Russian Federation. The “Orange Revolution” will not result in honest elections, greater transparency and accountability, better governance, and peaceful transitions of power, but rather the opposite. “Immunization” from the “Orange virus” may only be secured through the adoption of the Belarus authoritarian model, by “tightening the screws.” This will have negative consequences for democratization efforts and the role and function of NGOs (both indigenous and foreign), diplomatic missions, international exchanges, and other organizations in Russia and the CIS.

The “Orange Revolution” as “Orange Virus”

The presidential election in Kiev has been held up by analysts, politicians, and journalists in the Russian Federation as another worrying example of Western attempts to “manufacture democracy” in former Soviet space. Under the guise of mass popularity (“unpaid spontaneity” being considered a political oxymoron), Western-funded international organizations that advocate democracy—such as the OSCE, as well as U.S.-funded NGOs such as Freedom House, the U.S. Democratic Party’s National Democratic Institute and the Republicans’ International Republican Institute, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the George Soros-funded Open Society Foundation—are

* Dr. Graeme Herd is Associate Director, Senior Executive Seminar and Professor of Civil-Military Relations at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. The views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the George C Marshall European Center for Security Studies, the United States Department of Defense, the German Ministry of Defense, or the United States and German Governments. This thesis was first presented as part of the College of International and Security Studies “Brown Bag” research seminar series. I am grateful to John Kriendler for chairing this discussion and to my colleagues for their feedback.

considered to have underwritten the “revolution.” Diplomatic missions are also perceived to play a critical role (the U.S. embassies and USAID projects and programs in particular) in the deployment of revolutionary technologies that have facilitated regime change. This understanding of the role of national, international, and non-governmental organizations as both capable and willing to act in concert suggests that other post-Soviet states will then be targeted for regime change in a systematic and coordinated fashion, and in accordance with a secret strategic blueprint for change.

For evidence, those who hold this view argue that we have witnessed a number of revolutions, beginning in Serbia in 2000, followed by the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia in November 2003 and the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine in November 2004. These “revolutions” (so the argument goes) have been linked by a series of common features. The driving force behind each was a youth protest movement that used catchy slogans and symbols or logos. In Serbia it was Otpor (“Resistance”) with the slogan “*Gotovyje*” (“He is Finished!”) and the logo of a black fist on a white background. In Georgia, the youth movement was called “Kmara,” which doubled as the slogan “Enough,” and used the logo of a black fist on a yellow background. In Ukraine, the movement and the slogan were both “Pora” (“It is time”)—complemented by a new anthem, “*Vstavay!*,” or “Rise up!”—and accompanied by the symbol of orange scarves.

The networks and relations between these groups were consolidated through the sharing of media and PR and organizational knowledge. The Belgrade Center for Non-violent Resistance, for example, has helped train activists in Georgia, Belarus, and Ukraine. One of its activists, Sinisa Sikman, commented: “They [Pora] are applying knowledge and skills that we have previously taught them.”¹ Aleksandar Maric, a leader of Pora who worked with Ukrainian activists as part of a Freedom House program, stated: “We trained them to set up an organization, how to open local chapters, how to create a ‘brand,’ how to create a logo, symbols and key messages. We trained them how to identify the key weaknesses in society and what people’s most pressing problems were.”²

One Russian commentator noted, “As proved by experience, revolutions occur in states with weak leaders and strong oppositions. Establishing contacts with various international foundations and securing the funding happens according to the familiar scenario. One only has to remember how active the Soros Open Society Foundation is on former Soviet territory. Also take for example the U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles, who managed to do his job both in Belgrade and in Georgia. Further down the line, the streets get engaged in the regime change process, encouraged by business persons and oligarchs dissatisfied with incumbent regimes.”³ The thesis acknowledges that an attempt by “the West” to stage a “velvet revolution” during the 2001 presidential elec-

¹ ONASA/AP, Belgrade, 27 November 2004.

² Joel Brinkley, “Dollars for Democracy?: U.S. Aid to Ukraine Challenged,” *The New York Times*, 21 December 2004; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/21/politics/21ukraine.html?ei=1&en=b7f4e89c756eac5e&ex=1104620313&pagewanted=print&position=>

³ Tatyana Natreba, “Roses on blood: Does the ‘velvet revolution’ threaten Russia?” *Argumenty i Fakty*, 15 December 2004.

tions in Belarus failed. Although a youth movement named “Zubr” (“Bison”) was active (and sported an orange bison as a rallying symbol), the necessary preconditions — “weak leaders and strong opposition”—were not in place to ensure “success.” Taking a more global perspective, Zimbabwe under President Robert Mugabe and Venezuela under President Hugo Chavez (11 April 2002) have been added to the list of failed Western-backed post-modern *coup d’etat* attempts.⁴

Chain Reaction?

To put it simply, the view of the progression is as follows: “The day before yesterday: Belgrade. Yesterday: Tbilisi. Today: Kiev. Tomorrow: Moscow.”⁵ With respect to this understanding of events in Ukraine, and as part of an effort to place the Ukraine revolution in the context of other such “revolutions” in the Balkans and South Caucasus, many analysts have begun to examine the implications of such events for their relations with Ukraine and the West. They have also questioned whether such events might spread more broadly to the other CIS states, and have forecast some of the likely consequences for foreign and security policy-making in these states.

Russian analyst Sergei Markov is particularly specific. “I think the ‘orange revolution’ in Moldova is about 80 percent ready,” he has stated. “In Kyrgyzstan it’s 40 percent ready, and in Kazakhstan it’s 30 percent ready.”⁶ Another analyst declared, “Russia cannot afford to allow defeat in the battle for Ukraine. Besides everything else, defeat would mean velvet revolutions in the next two years, now following the Kiev variant, in Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and possibly Armenia.”⁷ *RIA Novosti* political commentator Andrei Ilyashenko agreed, arguing that the events in Ukraine would have a direct impact on electoral strategies and political succession throughout the CIS: “We may see a series of Rose Revolutions in post-Soviet republics in the next few years. The former Soviet elite standing at the helm there will have to hold elections sooner or later. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan may follow the Ukrainian example, and the West will hardly accept a smooth transition of power to the establishment heirs there.”⁸ Vyacheslav Nikonov, the President of the Politika Foundation, echoes such thoughts. “In Ukraine we are seeing yet again the implementation of an American ‘velvet revolution’ plan or, rather, a special operation to replace a regime that does not suit the United States, a process that had already been successfully tested

⁴ Jonathan Steele, “Ukraine’s Untold Story,” *The Nation*, 20 December 2004 issue; available at <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20041220&s=steele>. Steve Weissman, “How Uncle Santa Diddles Dems from Ukraine to Venezuela,” *Perspective*, 24 December 2004; available at http://www.truthout.org/docs_04/122404A.shtml.

⁵ Andrei Vladimirov, “An Exportable Revolution,” *Itogi* 49 (7 December 2004): 10–12. Translated by Pavel Pushkin.

⁶ Yuri Stroganov, “We Haven’t Lost Ukraine Yet, But We Must Learn From Our Mistakes,” *Trud* 2 (12 January 2005): EV. Translated by Gregory Malyutin.

⁷ Vitaliy Tretyakov, “Coin on the edge,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2 December 2004; available at www.rg.ru.

⁸ Andrei Ilyashenko, “A Bunch of Rose Revolutions,” *RIA Novosti*, 29 November 2004.

in ‘banana republics’ and was then transferred to the countries of Eastern Europe and Georgia. In just the same way as in past instances, diverse international structures and institutions have now been brought in to ‘unravel the knot.’”⁹

Gleb Pavlovsky, president of the Moscow-based Foundation for Effective Politics, and a political consultant who worked for Viktor Yanukovich’s campaign team in Ukraine, has drawn parallels between U.S.-sponsored regimes in Latin and South America during the Cold War and U.S. actions in post-Soviet space, arguing that there is a “transfer of a certain continental model to another continent.” However, he noted one important difference amidst this sea of similarities: “Now this is being done in the era of media technologies.”¹⁰ Former Russian State Duma speaker Gennady Seleznev has described the situation in Ukraine as “extremely alarming,” arguing that “We have the impression that what is taking place on Kiev’s streets is not happening spontaneously—it is a well-prepared action. You can even tell from the emblems that this is a revolution for export. These oranges, which do not grow in Ukraine, have suddenly become a symbol of liberals.”¹¹ Sergey Mironov, the Russian Federation Council chairman, stated that it was possible to detect “a producer’s hand” in the Ukrainian revolution, just as in Yugoslavia.¹²

The implications of these events for Russian power, prestige, and image are not open for debate—they are perceived to be negative. The Ukrainian presidential elections have been interpreted in the Russian media in the terms of a foreign-policy Waterloo, a “political Stalingrad,” Russia’s worst foreign-policy defeat in the post-Soviet period. One commentator has argued that recent events in Ukraine “can be seen as a planned strike against Russia aimed at creating ongoing instability on its southern borders. If this is pulled off, Russia will come up against a whole range of very complex problems: financial (the place of our capital in Ukraine), economic (linked to oil and gas pipelines to the West), political (questions of integration), military (the status of our fleet in Sevastopol), and demographic.”¹³

Countering the “Ukraine Scenario”: The Belarus Option?

The implications of the Kiev election for Russia’s domestic political order and its foreign policy, particularly within the CIS, have been widely debated by political analysts and elites in Moscow. One analyst noted that, since revolutions that are 100 percent imported fail to take root in foreign soil, it follows that external factors can only act as catalysts, and that therefore “some internal prerequisites do need to ripen. Thus, the question in principle becomes this: Does Russia have immunity to the ‘orange virus?’”

⁹ *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 1 December 2004.

¹⁰ “Conference on Ukraine with Effective Policy Fund President Gleb Pavlovsky,” *RIA Novosti*, 3 December 2004. See also: Natalya Galimova, “Political predictions. Russia under the axe. Gleb Pavlovskiy: Any moment, even the street cleaners in the capital will become revolutionaries,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 21 December 2004.

¹¹ RIA news agency, Moscow, 3 December 2004 (in Russian).

¹² ITAR-TASS news agency, Moscow, 27 December 2004 (in Russian).

¹³ Vyacheslav Kostikov, *Argumenty i Fakty*, Moscow, 30 November 2004.

The ways and means to stop the expected chain reaction of domino democratization have been avidly discussed throughout the CIS, with many analysts arguing that only stern preventative and pre-emptive counter-measures will stem the tide of revolutionary proliferation.

Certainly, Russia's Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov has stated that the CIS is Russia's top foreign-policy priority. Russia subsidizes the majority of the CIS through energy supplies. As Ivanov argued, "These are precisely the reasons why we react and will react the way we do to exports of revolution to the CIS states, no matter and what color—pink, blue, you name it—though of course we recognize and we understand that Russia has no monopoly on CIS states." He went on to note, "Yet someone has not abandoned stereotypes of the past, which is proven by the reaction of certain circles in Europe and the U.S.A. to the political crisis in Ukraine." Even prior to the presidential elections in Ukraine, "there had been clear signals that the West would not recognize the ballot results if the wrong candidate won the elections."¹⁴

This fear of Western-imported revolution appears to either herald a new crackdown or justify current policies towards opposition groups in some CIS states. NGOs, international organizations, diplomatic missions, and independent trade unions are increasingly perceived to constitute threats to internal security. In response, laws on protests and referendums are being toughened, and independent trade unions, opposition leaders, and their political parties are being squashed. Foreign and security policy is also influenced by such a perception, and it is likely that U.S./NATO-PfP military-to-military contacts will be scrutinized more closely than hitherto. Some states will likely grow more isolated from Western influences, and the image of the West as an external enemy may well be strengthened.

However, such policies may well backfire and implode under the weight of unintended consequences. Stanislav Belkovsky has noted with regard to Russia politics, "the anxiety is evident and will be expressed in the future in the form of screw tightening. The laws on protests and referendums will be toughened, independent trade unions will be dispersed, unfavorable parties will be finished. Most likely, an attempt will be made to propagate the image of the external enemy represented by the West." In Belkovsky's analysis, such a tendency will lead Russia down the Belarus path, towards a more authoritarian and managed future. "However, making this a professional action is unlikely to be a success—the personnel and professional shortage of the incumbent state power is too obvious," Belkovsky states. "Most likely, this will lead us to experience some sort of *déjà vu*, remembering the late stagnation era, and a partial repeat of the path Belarus is taking now."¹⁵

Andrey Illarionov, Russian Presidential Adviser on Economic Issues, has also forecast the self-defeating nature of further "Belarusification" tendencies in Russia under

¹⁴ Sergey B. Ivanov, Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, at the Council On Foreign Relations, New York, Inaugural Annual Lecture on Russia and Russian-American Relations, "The World in the 21st Century: Addressing New Threats and Challenges," 13 January 2005.

¹⁵ Konstantin Demchenko, "The Square Syndrome Versus The Russian Constitution," *Russkii Kurier*, 8 December 2004, 4. Translated by Andrei Ryabochkin and Alexander Dubovoi.

Putin. He argues that short-term victories over “the mass media, democratic institutions responsible for sending out messages, including messages of distress, crisis, and catastrophes to the public and to the authorities” through the “amputation of such institutions” would ultimately lead “to catastrophic consequences for the country and for the entire public. The consequences, compared to what they could be under an open system, occur on a much greater scale because in this situation, problems do not get solved. They accumulate, they become concentrated and sooner or later they are directed to the center of the political system. A way out of such crises happens not through elections but through revolutions. If there are no normal, traditional, legal methods of solving the crises then nothing else short of revolution is left.”¹⁶

One other factor that undermines the move towards a “Belarusification” of Russia’s domestic political landscape as an attempt to immunize Russia from the “Orange virus” or “plague” is the impact this would have on Russia’s relations with Euro-Atlantic states and institutions. “Moscow fears confrontation with the West far more than it fears the loss of its own influence within the former Soviet Union.” Adoption of the “Belarusification” option precludes G8 membership and strong EU trade relations. At any rate, this option is rendered very unlikely because Russia is now “too deeply involved in globalization, and too greatly dependent on the West—the chief customer for our oil and natural gas, our chief creditor, our chief supplier of investment and technology.”¹⁷

Boris Nemtsov, leader of the political right in Russia, though not agreeing with this characterization of the Ukrainian presidential elections, does express concern that Russian political strategists and campaign managers will learn the wrong ‘lessons’ from the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004 and apply them to the March 2008 presidential elections in Russia. “I am afraid that Russia will draw the opposite conclusions, namely, that censorship should be tightened, the opposition should be squeezed and so on. These will be fateful mistakes that may precipitate a revolution in Russia.”¹⁸ Despite such a prediction, at a meeting of the All-Russian Civic Congress—Russia for Democracy and Against Dictatorship with representatives of the liberal parties Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces, the speakers stated that Russian society was not ready for “street democracy.” Nemtsov himself noted, “There can be no orange revolution here. First of all because the ambitions of our politicians, including myself, are inordinately high and, unfortunately, have been put above Russia’s national interests.”¹⁹ As another analyst noted, “The Ukrainian model of regime-toppling (through

¹⁶ Ekho Moskvyy radio, 30 December 2004.

¹⁷ Andrei Vladimirov, “An Exportable Revolution,” *Itogi* 49 (7 December 2004): 10–12. Translated by Pavel Pushkin.

¹⁸ Boris Nemtsov, “For Putin Ukraine Is a Grandiose Pilot Project,” in “Russian Political Activists and Experts’ Views on Election in Ukraine and Its Possible Impact on Russia,” *Izvestia Daily*, 30 November 2004, 4.

¹⁹ RIA news agency, Moscow, 12 December 2004.

elections and street revolution) may be applied to Russia. There are no problems with money for it. The only problem is with the people.”²⁰

If events in Ukraine do not support tendencies toward a much more managed authoritarianism on the Belarus model, what alternative lessons might be drawn? Olga Kryshchanovskaya, head of the Centre for Studying Elites at the Sociology Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has argued that Ukraine is a dress rehearsal and trial run for the March 2008 Russian elections, and it illustrates the importance of transferring the center of power from president to parliament ahead of the election through amendments to the constitution or laws on government. “Vladimir Putin will assume the leadership of the One Russia party and a government of the parliamentary majority will then be elected,” she argues. “The only problem is in the choice of a candidate from the current Russian authorities for the post of future president without power. A strong personality will not do for this post, but a weak one may not get enough votes from the population.”²¹

In a similar vein, *Profil* magazine addressed the issue of political succession in Russia’s 2008 elections. In what it labeled “Operation Successor,” the magazine’s writers argued that the state is attempting to ensure succession by placing under its control financial and administrative resources (through the appointment and promotion of leaders who are personally loyal to the Kremlin), political parties and the electoral system, institutions, and the media (“the media space is docile to the point of sterility”; the “population is being entertained, enticed, counseled, but not informed”). It argues that the factors for selecting the 2008 successor are the same principles that were formed in 2000, on the eve of Yeltsin’s resignation. The first principle is that the successor must guarantee continuity of the elite. Second, if an economic crisis occurs, it must be managed without blame being directed towards Putin, tarnishing his reputation.²²

Although Konstantin Remchukov, the Russian deputy minister of economic development and trade, does not discount the possibility of such revolutions in other post-Soviet states, he argues that it will happen only where regimes have been in place “for at least two terms and became hackneyed among the people.” Societies in which expectations have been shattered are susceptible to the “charismatic passionate enthusiasm of masses.” In Russia, by contrast, “we have a different level of popularity and perception of Putin,” and citizens link their expectations of public justice and order to the President—expectations have yet to be shattered.”²³ In Russia, the Kremlin exercises almost complete control over the political system, realistic political alternatives are absent, the Russian economy is reviving, and Putin continues to be popular (his

²⁰ Valery Solovei, “Crisis For Export,” *Rodnaya Gazeta* 48 (December 2004): 2.

²¹ Vera Sitnina, “The psychology of an intrigue,” *Vremya Novostey*, 10 December 2004; available at www.vremya.ru.

²² What the Papers Say. Part A (Russia), Agency WPS, 22 December 2004.

²³ “Lessons of the Ukrainian revolution for Russia: A hangover from somebody else’s feast,” What the Papers Say. Part A (Russia), 8 December 2004, Wednesday, BBC Monitoring Service.

Angelemost recent approval rating was 69 percent)—but can the same be said for other regimes in the CIS? Analysts from Tajikistan to Armenia, Kyrgyzstan to Belarus, have argued that their states would also be unable to sustain such a “revolution.”

Fedor Lukyanov, editor in chief of the magazine *Rossiya v Globalnoy Politike* (Russia in Global Politics), has argued that Russia’s integration into the West “has been virtually frozen.” CIS states increasingly realize that Russian patronage no longer guarantees that incumbents can hold onto power, which will further undermine the CIS and the bilateral relations between Putin and post-Soviet leaderships. In addition, “the de facto curtailment of a Single Economic Space project, which ... becomes pointless after Ukraine’s withdrawal, will be far more painful.” He predicted that Moldova could be “the Ukraine of 2005”—that is, the geopolitical asset whose loss will result in new costs to Russia. It was feared that the 6 March 2005 Moldovan Parliamentary elections might result in a “Grape Revolution”²⁴ - but such a scenario did not emerge.

Reality Check

Does the CIS face a wave of Western-backed revolutions-for-export that will wash through former Soviet space, demolishing incumbent regimes and implanting pro-Western candidates from among the disparate counter-elites and opposition parties in these states, and so encircle Russia? Such an interpretation appears overblown, distorted by our proximity to the present, and lacking more considered judgment. Opposition movements throughout the CIS may well have been emboldened by the events in Tbilisi and Kiev, but the prospect of a more level playing field during election periods is less likely due to foreign interference, and more likely due to the emergence of stronger civil societies and institutions of democratic political culture than incumbents expected and believed would be possible after little more than a decade of post-Soviet governance.

What then of the “revolution for export” thesis? This idea, though weak in its essentials, is grounded in fact: Euro-Atlantic states and institutions do actively support the process of free and fair elections and political pluralism both in theory (for example, democratization underpins the U.S. National Security Strategy of September 2002) and in practice. There is a case to be made that Western security services did actively attempt to undermine the Milosevic regime following the Kosovo conflict, and that the overthrow of Milosevic in 2000 was partially orchestrated by external powers. However, the assertion that international organizations, states, and NGOs act in concert to achieve a grand strategy of transforming the CIS states into democracies through the export of catalytic revolutions rests on assumptions that are hard to credit.

First, it assumes that disparate organizations, institutions, and states are able to think strategically, exhibit high degrees of discipline to achieve a consensus of approach and division of labor, and then implement such a strategy. Such an understanding assumes homogeneity in outlook and orientation among, for example, the full spectrum of unruly NGOs, as well as the ability of governments and NGOs not only to

²⁴ www.Gazeta.ru, Moscow, 30 December 2004.

cooperate but also to work in lock step. While they do both support human rights and democratization efforts, these two groups hardly present a monolithic bloc. How are we to square George Soros-funded “regime change” in the U.S. (he supported the Kerry candidacy to the tune of \$15m) with his alleged cooperation with the Republican Institute for International Affairs in fomenting the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine?

Second, what of the contention that covert security services use unwitting NGOs as dupes or proxies, and are able thereby to effectively outsource the “revolution” and run it by remote control? To argue thus is to invest far more confidence in the power and ability of security service analytical and operational capacities than recent evidence of their miscalculations (in cases where real national interests were at least professed to be at stake) would suggest is warranted. The outsourcing of revolution through NGOs can never be as careful, systematic, and controlled as the proponents of this thesis would characterize the progress events; contingency, personalities, and the ability of civic organizations to set their own agendas should not be overlooked. The unification of three respective opposition blocs into one in Ukraine to push the opposition movement forward could hardly have been imposed from the outside.

Third, are we to believe “the West” has an overarching active policy and strategy with regard to this region? What of the failure of Western policy towards Ukraine, which at best might be described as “benign neglect”? As one analyst has pointed out, “Since President Leonid Kuchma took office in 1995, USAID has dumped close to \$1.5 billion into Ukraine. The destination of every penny of those funds is a matter of public record. Most of that money has gone to support reforms within the Ukrainian government. Only a few million dollars a year has gone to support a free press, free elections and other civil society-building initiatives. The bulk of USAID funding definitely did not end up with the opposition. Rather, it ended up with Kuchma’s corrupt government. One could thus argue that the United States did more to prop up the Kuchma regime than it did to support the opposition.”²⁵

Fourth, even in an age of omnipresent information technologies, are PR firms and pollsters really all-powerful? Gleb Pavlovsky, in classic poacher-turned-gamekeeper mode, cautions against “exaggerating the importance of political technologies and the revolutionary technologists as they are called. In fact, these are advisers or their support services. They may offer advice and consultations, and the most they can do is offer a scheme.”²⁶ Other analysts have discounted the extent to which the events in Kiev are ‘exportable’ within the CIS, arguing that not all CIS states can be considered pliant “victims of the West’s democratization techniques,” since not all of them possess the preconditions necessary to support successful “revolution”: “weak, closed-off regimes with authoritarian leanings, incapable of either sharing power or suppressing attempts

²⁵ Greg Bloom, “U.S. Can’t Buy Revolution,” *Moscow Times*, 23 December 2004. Bloom was editor in chief of *The Kiev Post* from 2000 to 2003. “The strongest indictment one could make about the effect of U.S.-funded democracy-building programs on the Ukrainian election is that they leveled the playing field for the opposition.”

²⁶ “Conference on Ukraine with Effective Policy Fund President Gleb Pavlovsky,” *RIA Novosti*, 3 December 2004.

to encroach on their monopoly of power.”²⁷ The internal political environment must be suitable for the import of revolution. If, for example, the popularity of the incumbent president is high, civil society is weak, the political elite is prepared to promise change, elections are not stolen in such blatant fashion, and the incumbent lacks a credible rival, then imported revolution will not take root. The failure of a “Grape Revolution” to take place in Moldova during the March parliamentary elections is a case in point.

Fifth, the ineptness of Putin’s counter-productive “Ukraine policy” has also been identified as a factor in shaping the “Orange Revolution.” The policy itself constituted a self-inflicted wound: “Moscow with its technology of interference has deepened the split in Ukrainian society—but to its own detriment. The Russian presence allowed radicals to resurrect elements of the national liberation struggle and to return—at least a section of citizens—to 1991, that is, to Ukraine’s struggle for independence from Russia. Putin became the factor that helped to unite Ukrainian nationalists, liberals, and socialists against the authorities and against Moscow. Having taken part in the Ukrainian struggle, Moscow has not only excluded for itself the role of arbitrator in the Ukrainian process, but has also narrowed the field for domination in the post-Soviet space. To our eyes, an event has taken place that in terms of its consequences for Russia may turn out to be more serious than the expansion of NATO and the EU.”²⁸

In short, “the West” lacks the ability—never mind the political will—to conduct such “special operations,” while incumbents in the region usually have both the will and ability to suppress internal dissent. Where such “revolutions” do occur, they are characterized by the presence of unpopular incumbents that have lost control over both their popular support and substantial parts of their own state apparatus. The real threat to authoritarian regimes is not that foreign NGOs work in concert with Western security services, but that they work at all. Under certain conditions, self-determination can occur, and peoples can assert their rights. Teaching the principles of democracy to citizens in a semi-authoritarian system will inevitably empower the incumbents’ opposition and work to the disadvantage of pro-government parties. It remains a reality that “[p]eaceful popular protests backed by OSCE standards on elections can bring down entrenched corrupt regimes that rely on vote fraud to remain in power.”²⁹ But while highlighting shortfalls in transparency and democratic accountability does undermine authoritarian regimes, replacing “imitation” with “electoral” democracy hardly constitutes a postmodern *coup d’etat*.

²⁷ Vladimirov, “An Exportable Revolution.”

²⁸ Liliya Shevtsova, “A test with Ukraine. Will Putin and the regime created by him pass it?” *Novaya Gazeta*, 6 December 2004; available at www.novayagazeta.ru. See also: Mikhail Zygar, “Working on success: Sergey Lavrov congratulates himself on ‘positive’ year,” *Kommersant*, Moscow, 20 January 2005, 9 (in Russian).

²⁹ Christopher Smith, “Democracy in the CIS,” *The Washington Times*, 12 January 2005. Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ) is the U.S. Helsinki Commission Chairman.

Prospectus, 2005–2008: Rhetoric Trumps Reality?

However, the “exported revolution” thesis cannot be dismissed so lightly; it will have a political impact. A belief in the thesis, whether sincere or fabricated, will shape domestic and foreign policies in CIS states, particularly in how post-Soviet elites safeguard power and manage political successions. Just as in some Central Asian states the allegation that the political opposition is linked to Al-Qaeda has been used to legitimize a crackdown by authorities on legitimate parties, so too in the rest of the CIS the allegation that opposition parties are backed by Western security services will prove to be both a powerful and perhaps even a popular mobilizing tool for the incumbents and a clear means of justifying greater state control over political opposition. Incumbent authorities are now able to play the “Ukrainian card” during elections: “What is better,” they ask, “stability and inter-ethnic accord or confrontation that threatens a split in society?”³⁰

Following the Parliamentary elections in February 2005, President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan faced anti-government protests. He declared in a speech to parliament that the “opposition is directed and funded from the outside.” Akayev went on to assert: “The events in Kyrgyzstan are not isolated from any of the so-called color revolutions that have been staged in other . . . countries over the last 18 months. Such revolutions, which are nothing more than coups, go beyond the framework of the law.”³¹ Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, denounced as “counter-productive” and “tactless” the E.U.'s public criticism of the parliamentary election. In particular, he criticised a statement issued by the E.U. foreign policy and security chief, Javier Solana, expressing concern that the parliamentary vote “fell short of OSCE (the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe) commitments and other international standards.”³²

It is not beyond the realm of possibility that many post-Soviet elites might even sincerely believe such a thesis, particularly those who view security issues through the prism of their Soviet experience, drawing on Stalin for notions of encirclement and on Leninist/Bolshevik ideology to shape their understanding of the phenomenon of ‘revolution.’ The 1917 October Revolution highlighted the fact that revolutions need vanguard parties consisting of intellectuals, ideologists, and organizers. If Russia has not supplied them, then “the West” must have done so. It therefore follows that the monolithic West has a strategic approach to post-Soviet space that allows for a carefully coordinated, systematic approach to regime change: after all, that is how the Soviet Union approached its international relationships during the Cold War. Max Boot, a well-known U.S. neoconservative, has argued that a little external help goes a long way

³⁰ Vyacheslav Timirbayev, “Will we learn a lesson from the Ukrainian elections?” *MSN Bishkek*, 7 December 2004, 5 (in Russian).

³¹ Peter Finn, “Kyrgyz Leader Hints at Plot by West,” *Washington Post*, 23 March 2005; “Velvet Revolution in Kyrgyzstan Unlikely,” *Kommersant*, Moscow, 28 February 2005, 9 (in Russian).

³² Vladimir Radyuhin, “Russia Warns West Over Kyrgyzstan,” *The Hindu*, 24 March 2005.

in supporting democratic opposition movements to overthrow anti-democratic incumbents: “We need to apply elsewhere the lessons of Ukraine, which are also the lessons of Georgia, Serbia, Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, South Africa, Poland, Lithuania and other countries where despotic regimes have been toppled since the original ‘people power’ revolution swept the Philippines in 1986. An obvious candidate for a similar transformation is Iran.”³³ Such statements can only reinforce current fears and paranoia among stakeholders within the CIS and Middle East, as illustrated by Syrian responses to the “Cedar Revolution” in Lebanon.

The “Orange Revolution” poses policy questions for CIS states, foreign and domestic security services, diplomatic missions, NGOs, and other actors in civil society within the CIS. There are three constants that we can accept. First, all of these actors increasingly compete or cooperate to occupy the same policy arena in the CIS. Here agendas, initiatives, issues, goals, objectives, policy instruments, and tools are created, pursued, and utilized. Second, it is generally accepted that it is legitimate for foreign diplomatic missions to support the efforts of the government and peoples of their host state to build a modern, prosperous, stable, and democratic country in accordance with the laws of the state and international practice. To this end, a focus by foreign states on the legitimacy of the process of free, fair, and transparent elections is not a breach of a state’s sovereignty or interference in its internal affairs, unless the diplomatic missions explicitly support one particular candidate or faction. Third, a hallmark and one measurement of democratic political culture is the acceptance by state authorities of the idea that NGOs and civil society are free to support both a democratization process and particular candidates or parties, even if this undermines the power of incumbents.

In some states in post-Soviet space, these constants are barely acknowledged as legitimate. Cooperation and coordination between diplomatic mission and NGOs as an end in itself is increasingly perceived in a negative light. This link is not viewed as pursuing the goal of building a vibrant and democratic civil society, but as a means to another more sinister and threatening end—regime change. Some regimes in the CIS have understood only too well the complexity and power of Western-style NGOs and civil society as actors; they can have simultaneously competing and cooperative agendas, with significant implications for domestic, foreign, and security policy. However, the possibility that such influence can occur not only outside the formal control or informal influence (or even knowledge?) of Western diplomatic missions/security services is not countenanced.

Moreover, the growing power of civil society—particularly when an expression of popular protest sparked by the intense frustration and disappointment of a stolen election and a brake on change—is underestimated by most of the ruling elites in the CIS. An exception is Russian MP Aleksandr Lebedev, deputy head of the Duma CIS committee and co-chairman of the Russo-Ukrainian inter-parliamentary commission. With reference to the “Orange Revolution,” he noted, “In the final analysis, it was not the

³³ Max Boot, “Exporting the Ukraine Miracle,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 December 2004, B11. Max Boot is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

administrative levers and not interference in Ukraine's affairs by one state or another, or for that matter by any other forces, that was crucial there. It was the fact that three million people took to the streets in Kiev that was, in my view, the more important development. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to imagine that three million people could by means of some sort of political spin be induced to take to the streets in temperatures that were as low as minus 12 Centigrade and stay there for weeks on end. It was an expression of the will of Kievans and Ukrainians who had flocked to Kiev."³⁴

Lastly, this begs the question of whether democracy as a political system is a universal concept. President Akayev, for example, has argued that "national democracy" and the securing of stability is a first prerequisite that must be attained before Western-style democracy can follow. Interestingly, Anatol Lieven has argued something similar with regard to Russia in a recent issue of *Foreign Policy*: only a semi-authoritarian government now will allow for the possibility of liberal democracy in Russia in the future; therefore, President Putin is to be supported.³⁵ If this is so, then to what extent can the goal of "stability first" in support of higher national goals ("national democracy"/traditional values) be pursued by regimes, before diplomatic missions and NGO observers conclude that despotic authoritarianism is the real goal and that incumbents are determined to hold on to power at any and all costs? What levels of torture, imprisonment, and harassment in pursuit of "stability first" are permissible? Where should diplomatic missions draw the line between achieving strategic security partnerships and upholding their democratic values? Although these difficult questions have no uniform answer across the CIS, it appears that Western tolerance levels and cost/benefit analyses are still measured in the terms of *realpolitik* and national interest. Tolerance is low when perceived national interests are at stake, high when they are not: for example, on 26 December 2004 there were around 25 OSCE monitors in Uzbekistan, 10,000 monitors in Ukraine.

After the events of the "Orange Revolution," new considerations might now focus and shape thinking on the subject of strategic power distribution and continuity among post-Soviet incumbent leaders. Can incumbents finesse a transfer of power to their chosen successors on the Yeltsin-Putin model, or will they increasingly run the risk that this attempt is more prone to break down along the lines of the Kuchma-Yanukovich variant? Would the use of constitutional courts, securing two-thirds majorities in parliaments, or popular referendums secure the same goal, or could this goal precipitate the very expression of mass people power that it sought to avoid? Might incumbents be more inclined to allow for a more or less democratic transfer of power to counter-elites in return for immunity from prosecution for corruption while in office? The treatment of Shevardnadze and particularly Kuchma will be closely watched in this respect. In the final analysis, are the military and security forces to be relied upon as a loyal praetorian guard that will obey presidential orders and suppress popular discontent, or

³⁴ Ekho Moskvyy radio, Moscow, 14 January 2005.

³⁵ Anatol Lieven, "The Essential Vladimir Putin," *Foreign Policy* 145 (January/February 2005): 76-77.

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might they refuse to respond or be sufficiently divided that incumbents run the risk of execution, as was the case in the 1989 Ceausescu Romanian instance of “revolution”?