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Color Revolutions and Russia

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

"Color revolution" is an ambiguous term in Russian as well as English. Its meaning is difficult to pin down, and so is the nature of the upheavals that, between 2003 and 2010, convulsed Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan. Were these color revolutions a second wave of the "velvet revolutions" that accompanied the fall of Communism in 1989? Or did they represent something new, a distinct type of revolution specific to post-Soviet space (or post-Communist space, if we include Serbia in 2000)? Or were the color revolutions, as the Russian propaganda machine alleges, inspired from abroad and directed against legitimate authorities in sovereign states and, indirectly, against Russia itself?

The real or imaginary involvement of the West in the color revolutions is the main reason why Russian officials adamantly deny the revolutionary character of these events and classify them, instead, as mere coups. In Kyrgyzstan, no Western involvement could be proved in either the Tulip Revolution that overthrew President Askar Akayev in March 2005 or in the events of April–June 2010 that resulted in the ouster of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Nor did anti-Russian motives play a significant role. Nevertheless, in the first case, Russian propaganda easily found a way to concoct a story line involving both outside interference and an anti-Moscow plot. A local "mafia," allegedly associated with foreign forces, became a substitute for "the West," and the pro-Russian character of the new regime was declared to be a "victory for healthy forces" over the "conspirators." In April 2010, by contrast, the Russian mass media dropped all mention of foreign influence from its interpretation of the Kyrgyz events, focusing exclusively on the domestic factors that unleashed the mayhem.

From a scholarly perspective, in any case, the question of the nature of the color revolutions remains wide open.

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4.2 WERE THERE ANY REVOLUTIONS?

Those who lose by a revolution are rarely inclined to call it by its real name.
– Leon Trotsky

Ironically, official Russian criticism of the so-called color revolutions is explicitly or implicitly based on the traditional Marxist definition of social revolution. This definition emphasizes the transfer of hegemony from one class to another and therefore the social gravity of the transformation. In effect, Russian commentators on the color revolutions avoid using modern social-scientific definitions of revolution. The reason is clear. Modern social science's definitions of revolution are broad and encompassing enough to include all types of revolutions, not only the most prominent ones. The semantic core of these definitions is more or less the same, having scarcely evolved over the past fifty years. Let us recall some of these definitions. Revolution is defined, for example, as a "change, effected by the use of violence, in government, and/or regime, and/or society" (Stone 1966, 159). Alternatively, "revolution in its most common sense is an attempt to make a radical change in the system of government. This often involves the infringement of prevailing constitutional arrangements and the use of force" (Laqueur 1968, 501). And here is the most up-to-date definition: revolution is "An effort to transform political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society. This effort is accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine authorities" (Goldstone 2001, 142).

The color revolutions, from Georgia's to Kyrgyzstan's, exhibit all of the elements cataloged in such definitions. In each case, mass mobilization was accompanied by sporadic violence or at least by threats of violence. Fortunately, full-scale violence entailing the death of many people happened only once – in Kyrgyzstan in April and June 2010. But, in each country, efforts were made to refashion political institutions and to reestablish political authority on a new footing. Sometimes these efforts were successful, sometimes not. In all of the countries where they occurred, the color revolutions were ideologically motivated either by an articulated democratic myth (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova) or by a vague but fervent longing for justice and freedom (Kyrgyzstan). Though the color revolutions were not profound social revolutions, therefore, they can definitely be classified as political revolutions.

Theoretically, the dynamics of the color revolutions are especially interesting. They began as revolutions in the etymological sense: revolution as a return to the origins or the status quo ante; they were triggered, that is to say, when political incumbents violated written constitutional rules. In some sense, therefore, we can say that the color revolutions represented attempts to restore a lost legitimacy. But their specificity lies in the fact that the rules, whose violation sparked the protests, had never been respected in reality. They existed on paper but were routinely flouted in practice. As a consequence, to the extent that these

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revolutions succeeded in "restoring" legitimacy, they were genuine revolutions in the modern sense; that is, they seriously transformed power relations in the affected societies.[1]

Foreign involvement, even if real as opposed to imaginary, does not disqualify a political upheaval being considered a revolution. Indeed, the theory of revolution typically considers foreign intervention to be one of the principal causes of revolution (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the forms and methods of foreign intervention have become more sophisticated and varied than in earlier times. Old-fashioned methods, such as the export of revolution or brutal pressure, have been replaced with soft power influence through culture, values, lifestyles, and institutional networks. In the case of the color revolutions, significantly, revolutionary activity was largely a by-product of Western influence, without necessarily been orchestrated by the West.

Both the European Union and the United States have established a network of foundations and grant-giving programs in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Reliable estimates of the scale and influence of these efforts are not available, however. In any case, the effectiveness of these foundations and their programs obviously hinges on the receptiveness of the local populations, that is, on the already-accomplished sociocultural transformation of the prerevolutionary societies. The seeds of Western influence can grow only in soil that had been prepared.

Most of the labor migration from Ukraine and Moldova (and also from Belarus) has gone to Europe, not to Russia. Labor remittances from Europe are an important source of revenue for these countries. To their citizens, more importantly, Europe is much more attractive than Russia. In fact, Russia has increasingly become a negative, not a positive, model for other post-Communist societies. All of the young people in Georgia and Moldova, and a considerable number in Ukraine, take their bearings from Western values and culture. The new generation is almost completely oblivious to Soviet history and Soviet cultural heritage. This pro-Western orientation also prevails among Belarusian youth, foreshadowing Belarus's probable future.

Responding to a journalist's question about causes of the decline of Communism, the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, answered with atypical succinctness: "Culture." The ground for the velvet revolutions of the 1980s–90s was prepared by the sociocultural transformation of Communist societies. Changes that were similar in size and vector provided the basis for the color revolutions too.

Russia was unable to prevent the color revolutions in a hostile Georgia, in the mainly loyal Ukraine and Moldova, and in the entirely dependent Kyrgyzstan. In 2004, Russia had much greater influence in Ukraine than any of the other foreign players. During the presidential elections, the Kremlin openly intervened in Ukraine's internal affairs, actively supporting Viktor Yanukovich, one of

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the presidential candidates. Vladimir Putin, Russian president at the time, was personally involved in Yanukovich's campaign.

It is implausible to finger the West as the main culprit behind Russia's failure to achieve the result it sought in this election. The inability of the Russian elite to understand post-Soviet dynamics, a mishandling of its potential influence, and the lack of appeal of Russia's developmental model provide an explanation for the failure of Russian policy in the post-Soviet region that is more convincing than some "geopolitical conspiracy" against Russia.

In any case, the role played by external forces in the color revolutions does not disqualify them from being called revolutions. On the contrary, it vividly confirms the revolutionary nature of the events.

4.3 CAUSES OF THE REVOLUTIONS

Successful revolutions resemble Leo Tolstoy's happy families. For a revolution to erupt and succeed, a well-known combination of structural factors is required (Brinton 1952; Stone 1966; Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001, 2003). We can identify more or less the same set of factors playing the same roles in all of the color revolutions.

The first common factor was a crisis of state power wherein the state was perceived by the elites and the masses as both ineffective and unfair. In the color revolutions, the charge that state authorities had conducted fraudulent national elections served to crystallize a widely shared belief in the injustice of the state, thereby triggering the revolutions. The extent of the fraud and the absence of dispositive evidence that it had occurred were unimportant. Post-Communist societies perceive their authorities as unjust and prone to electoral fraud a priori.[2] A deep moral distrust of state power fueled its political delegitimation. In the cultural context of a revolutionary crisis, political instability, material deprivation, and threats to personal security were attributed to the chronic injustice and moral defects of the state, in sharp contrast to the goodness and just intentions of the opposition. When the authorities refused to repress the opposition, their reluctance to use force did not elevate the moral authority of the state but was perceived instead as a sign of its weakness and ineptitude. Repression, however, was not an astute way to overcome the crisis. When used, it confirmed the impression of the state's unfairness and intensified mass protests, especially when repressive violence was employed against innocent bystanders, as happened, for example, in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010. The authorities were trapped. Repression proved that the state was unjust; but the refusal to repress, in a revolutionary crisis, demonstrated the state's weakness.

This trap was sprung because part of the elite refused to support the regime and preferred to seek alternative ways to resolve the revolutionary crisis. Supported by cohesive elites, states are generally invulnerable to revolution from

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below (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001). Splits within the elite constitute the second structural element observable in all successful revolutions.

Ordinary intra-elite conflict does not suffice. A revolution presupposes the formation of elite factions with divergent ideologies and different notions about the kind of social order that is desirable. A split of the elite, roughly speaking, into conservative and (proto-)democratic factions took place in all of the color revolutions from Georgia to Moldova. In Georgia, the weak regime grouping around Shevardnadze was opposed by the elite faction led by Saakashvili, Burjanadze, and Zhvania. In Ukraine, Yanukovych was opposed by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. In Kyrgyzstan, Akayev was opposed by Bakiyev, Kulov, and Otunbaeva, and, subsequently, President Bakiev was opposed by Otunbaeva. In Moldova, President Voronin was opposed by Gimpu and Filat. In every case, opponents of the regime offered what they called a democratic alternative to the status quo.

The third structural factor explaining the outbreak of revolutions is an economic crisis or crisis of national welfare. This factor did not play such a self-evident role in the color revolutions as the first two. In this regard, debates about the color revolutions resemble polemics between Vladimir Lenin and Alexis de Tocqueville. Lenin considered a socioeconomic crisis, the impoverishment of the lower classes ("the aggravation of the laboring classes beyond their normal needs and misery"), to be an important cause of revolution. Invoking the example of the French Revolution, by contrast, Tocqueville argued that revolutions are caused, paradoxically, not by a worsening but by an improvement of the socioeconomic situation. Economic development is politically destabilizing when the needs of the population grow faster than the resources required to satisfy them. In other words, political and social revolution begins with an eruption of rising expectations.

The experience of the color revolutions corroborates both hypotheses simultaneously, without favoring one or the other. In Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the socioeconomic situation was horrific on the eve of the revolution. In Moldova, it had worsened because of the global crisis, but not dramatically. Conversely, Ukraine enjoyed an unprecedented period of economic growth of 12 to 14 percent per year for two to three years before the Orange revolution. This increased prosperity created a substantial Ukrainian middle class and emboldened its political ambitions, inducing Ukrainian society to press its demands on the Ukrainian state.

A sharp deterioration in the standard of living, we can infer, does not necessarily precede a revolutionary outbreak. This factor, emphasized by Lenin, is important, but only in combination with other structural factors that increase its impact. Even the most dramatic fall in living standards does not lead to revolution unless it is combined with other factors. The economic situation in Ukraine was much worse prior to the presidential elections of 2010 than they had been in 2004.

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On its own, intra-elite conflict leads to coups, not to revolutions. Similarly, mass mobilization by itself leads to popular uprisings or even civil wars, but not to revolutions. A combined attack on state authority by the elites and the masses is critically required for a revolution. A successful revolution is hardly possible in the absence of this fourth structural factor.

An alliance between a portion of the elite and society at large played a key role in all of the color revolutions. In general, mass mobilization occurred peacefully, although it was accompanied by threats of violence and even some of its manifestations. Only the latest revolution, in Kyrgyzstan, was attended by widespread violence.

No revolution can occur in the absence of an opposition ideology. This is the fifth structural factor. An opposition ideology is required to unite a faction of the elite and the masses in their struggle against the government. It justifies this shared struggle and offers an alternative vision of social order. A utopia (in Karl Mannheim's sense) of justice and liberation formed the mythological core of the color-revolutionary ideologies. In Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, this mythical core was rationalized and articulated in the form of a democratic ideology. In Kyrgyzstan, it took the shape of a vague but intense desire for justice.

The sixth and last – but not the least important – structural factor explaining revolution is external influence. In the color revolutions, as already explained, this influence took the form not so much of direct political involvement as of sociocultural influence, the perception of Western democracy as a guiding norm and image of the future. In this way, the West played an important role in the ideological utopia of the color revolutions (except in Kyrgystan).

External factors therefore fueled oppositional ideology and magnified the influence of factors such as deteriorating standards of living when they were present. In Ukraine, external influence was strong enough to compensate for the absence of an economic downturn. As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to detect any serious Western influence in Kyrgyzstan. The country was and remains Russia's financial client. Russia has a decisive sociocultural impact on Kyrgyz society and serves as the main outlet for Kyrgyz labor migration. Conversely, if external factors include revolutionary examples and the influence of revolutionary events per se, then we can detect external influence in Kyrgyzstan as well. There is no doubt that Georgia's Rose revolution served as a source of inspiration, a model and a reservoir of political experience for all of the color revolutions, including the first Kyrgyz or Tulip revolution. Roza Otunbayeva, one of the leaders of both the first and second Kyrgyz revolutions, was well acquainted with Georgian revolutionary experience.

Thus, in two countries, Georgia and Moldova, we find all six of the structural preconditions of revolution. In Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, we find five. In Ukraine, the national economy was not undergoing a significant crisis. In Kyrgyzstan, there was little external influence. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan

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exhibited demographic overheating, a structural factor absent in the other color revolutions.

Demography has played an important role in large-scale historical upheavals. It served as a kind of "Malthusian" foundation for the revolutionary crises and wars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A clear correlation between population growth and the scale of social violence cannot be denied. But demography played no significant role in either the velvet or color revolutions. The only exception is Kyrgyzstan, where the demographic overheating played an important structural role in the crisis. In a way, Kyrgyzstan's "youth bulge" compensated for the missing external influence. At the same time, demographic overheating contributed to the atypical level of revolutionary violence.

Often associated with the color revolutions, the active participation of young people is actually common to all revolutions. An interesting comparative analysis of the color revolutions could be made using such parameters as protest identities and type of mobilization, the nature of leadership, gender, and so forth, but these issues are secondary to my main line of argument.

4.4 REVOLUTIONARY RESULTS

My claim is that the color revolutions were by nature democratic, or at least (as in Kyrgyzstan) proto-democratic. This thesis is supported by such evidence as the opposition's democratic ideology, its choice of the West as a model of development, and the generally peaceful character of the revolutionary movements. The only exception, once again, was Kyrgyzstan.

But can the political regimes that were established in the wake of the color revolutions be called democratic? Revolutions are not linked deterministically to their aftermath, and that includes the resulting political regime. Similarly, the consequences of revolutions cannot be deduced from their structural preconditions. Democracy or dictatorship, peace or war, the depth of political and socioeconomic changes are the result of a complex and unpredictable constellation of structural factors. In general, the results of revolution are more random than predefined (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001, 2003). The post-Soviet color revolutions abundantly corroborate this theoretical perspective.

They also confirm the observations that revolutionary efforts devoted to restructuring political institutions stifle economic growth and that pre- and postrevolutionary elite cleavage has a deleterious effect on economic progress. In most cases, the long-term economic development of revolutionary regimes lags behind the development of comparable countries that did not experience revolutions. Perhaps the development of democratic institutions will ultimately have a catalytic effect on the economic performance of countries emerging from the color revolutions. At present, however, the economic failures of the color revolutions are more evident than their achievements. And the development of political democracy does not necessarily compensate for these failures.

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Only when discussing Ukraine, despite authoritarian tendencies of President Victor Yanukovich and, to a lesser degree, Moldova, we can speak more or less confidently about favorable prospects for democracy, while the democratic futures of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan look uncertain and troubling. Ukrainian democracy is showing promise if only because the country has changed governments in three out of four presidential elections. This has not led to democratic consolidation and stabilization. But Ukraine has witnessed an important and successful experiment in relatively free and fair elections, power sharing, and peaceful conflict resolution.

One of the key factors in the survival of Ukrainian democracy was a bitter conflict within the Ukrainian elite. An equality of forces between elite factions cast them into a shared dilemma: mutual destruction or compromise. A mechanism for compromise was, in turn, provided by democratic institutions and procedures. The Ukrainian situation confirms once again the perennial observation that democracy grows not from the merits of the people but from their shortcomings. Democracy serves not to build a paradise on earth but to prevent a hell on earth.

While elite conflict, on matters of policy, has promoted the development of democracy as a mechanism for intra-elite compromise, in the economy, it has caused disruption and managerial paralysis. The phenomenal Ukrainian economic boom ended almost immediately after the Orange revolution, and primarily because of internal, not external, factors. To reach even a limited degree of political democracy, Ukraine has had to suffer massive economic and social losses. Since the beginning of 2010, however, the Ukrainian economy has demonstrated a high rate of recovery – nearly as high as the rate of decline in 2008–9.

Moldova's economic problems cannot be attributed to a revolution that took place in the context of a global economic crisis. Moldova is very poor country by European standards. A significant portion of the population works in Europe and Russia. At the same time, democratic procedures and the rules of the game are respected in Moldova, and the country's regime is mainly pluralistic and reasonably liberal. Neighboring and ethnically similar Romania serves as a model and stimulus for Westernization in Moldova. The country's economic prospects, even in case of integration with Romania, do not look favorable, however.

In Georgia, the democratic potential of the revolution was emasculated. The regime of Mikhail Saakashvili displays all the signs of authoritarianism, nor can it be called successful from an economic point of view. Any country that chooses a military path to restoring its territorial integrity by definition diminishes its potential for normal economic development and will tend toward authoritarian government. Despite its defeat in the five-day war in August 2008, the Georgian government was able to resist the attacks of its domestic opposition, demonstrating its political strength. While the Saakashvili regime could not be called democratic and fair, it can at least be considered efficient.

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The Georgian revolution therefore resulted in the establishment of a regime that is stronger than its predecessor, but less democratic, although the victory of the oppositional "Georgian Dream" coalition of billionaire businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili in the parliamentary elections of October 2012 significantly revived the chances of Georgia's democratic transformation.

Unlike Georgia, postrevolutionary Kyrgyzstan did not produce any positive outcome: neither political democracy, nor economic growth, nor efficient power. Bakiyev's regime turned out to be even more corrupt, inefficient, and unpopular than that of the deposed Akayev. Even massive migration of Kyrgyz workers to Russia was unable to save the country from demographic overheating. A deep internal crisis resulted in a new revolution in April 2010, which came as a complete surprise to observers.

Of the four countries that have experienced color revolutions, only two – Ukraine and Moldova – have achieved relative success in the consolidation of democracy. The regimes formed in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are undemocratic, although they observe democratic procedures and rituals. In Georgia, however, the new government is more efficient than its predecessor, at least when it comes to suppressing domestic opposition. In Kyrgyzstan, the new government could not even achieve this much, a failure that eventually sparked another revolution. The new Kyrgyz authorities' main problem now seems to be not the creation of genuine democracy but rather the preservation of Kyrgyzstan's territorial integrity.

If the political results of color revolutions were ambivalent, their economic consequences were mostly negative. In Ukraine, postrevolutionary intra-elite conflict has led to the interruption of previously impressive growth and an economic crisis that has been worsened by the global crisis. Drastic economic deterioration occurred in Kyrgyzstan, despite Russian support, Chinese investment, and considerable (relative to the Kyrgyz budget) revenues from America's lease of the "Manas" airbase. In Georgia and Moldova, the postrevolutionary regimes have failed to produce economic growth. Such growth was probably never a realistic possibility in either country.

The negative economic consequences of revolution are the rule rather than the exception. Nor does the democratic character of a revolution guarantee the consolidation of democracy. In Russian political debates, the negative results of the color revolutions have been cited as an important argument in a counter-revolutionary propaganda campaign meant to discredit both these revolutions and the idea of revolution itself.

4.5 FOLLOWING NICHOLAS I

The Russian reaction to the color revolutions was extreme. The Kremlin's sharpest reaction was provoked by Ukraine's Orange revolution. The reason is obvious. Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova are small countries that do not interest Russia either from an economic or geopolitical point of view. As for Georgia, it is even perceived as a hostile state.

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Russians have always considered Ukraine, by contrast, as a key post-Soviet country because of its size, geopolitical position, historical and cultural proximity, and economic potential. The Russian political elite, however, has consistently regarded its western neighbor in a haughty manner, erroneously viewing the 2004 Ukrainian elections as a foregone conclusion. The massive public protest, which radically changed the political situation, came as a complete surprise to Russian and European observers.

Appalled by its loss of political influence in Ukraine, the Kremlin also discerned within the Orange revolution potential dangers for Russia itself. Moreover, a wave of retirees' protests against so-called monetization (the transformation of in-kind subsidies for pensioners into depreciable cash payments) swept through Russia immediately after the Ukrainian revolution, although not because of it. These geriatric demonstrators broke the stereotype of Russians as passive and incapable of social protest.

The post-Soviet color revolutions have had a pervasive impact on Russian politics. I will mention only some of their most important consequences. First, government spending on pensioners and the poor were significantly increased to dampen social protest. Second, an ideological doctrine was developed to justify the status quo. This was Vladislav Surkov's concept of "sovereign democracy." Third, attitudes toward political opposition, protest, and unauthorized social activities became significantly more restrictive and illiberal. Fourth, anti-Western propaganda campaigns have been carried out from time to time to mobilize Russian society and convince the public that the West is conducting "subversive" actions against Russia. Fifth, pro-government youth groups have been created to disrupt unauthorized mass political demonstrations.

In general, the Kremlin's political and ideological activities between 2005 and 2008 were openly and consistently counterrevolutionary. Typologically, they replicated the counterrevolutionary strategy of the Russian emperor Nicholas I, during whose reign Russia was nicknamed the "gendarme of Europe." Needless to say, the forms and methods of the new Russian counterrevolution differ from those used in the second third of the nineteenth century. In 2005, Russia did not dispatch troops to the rebellious Ukraine, as it had sent them to a rebellious Poland in 1830 or to revolutionary Hungary in 1848–49. But in January 2006 and 2007, Russia did shut down gas supplies to Ukraine. Different times, different tunes – but the ideological music remains the same.

Conceptually, the ideological justifications for counterrevolution under Nicholas I and under Vladimir Putin were identical. The government of Nicholas I consistently defended the principle of legitimism, opposed the export of revolutionary ideas (behind which it spied a vast international conspiracy), and opposed democracy on principle.

"Democracy cannot be exported from one country to another. Just as you cannot export revolution, just as you cannot export ideology," remarked President Putin in 2005. Nikolai Patrushev, then the Federal Security Service director, was even more outspoken in his statements, directly accusing foreign intelligence services of destabilizing Russia's neighbors.

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During the reign of Nicholas I, Count Uvarov formulated the doctrine of Russian autocracy – the so-called theory of official nationality. It was meant as an ideological response to the revolutionary movements sweeping Europe. Despite the doctrine's name, its central point was not nationality but autocracy – the monarchy that exercised complete sway over the country and society and was not bound by any internal or external constraints. In other words, Uvarov's doctrine defined the Russian empire as a sovereign monarchy. It was a Russian response to the democratic principle of popular sovereignty. The two other items of Uvarov's triad, orthodoxy and nationality, were treated as derivatives, entirely dependent on and subservient to the monarchy. Uvarov's theory was ideologically opposed to the ideas of popular sovereignty, republicanism, and nationalism that pervaded the ideological climate of his time.

The idea of sovereign democracy, put forward by Surkov, the chief ideologist Russian power, is a modern version of Uvarov's theory. The meaning of "sovereign democracy" is simple: the Russian government is free from any internal and external constraints and exercised complete control over Russian society. Not unlike Uvarov's doctrine, Surkov's sovereign democracy emerged as an ideological response to the dynamics of the Ukrainian Orange revolution. As in the nineteenth, so in the twenty-first century, revolution abroad provided the decisive impetus for an ideological articulation of the inchoate sentiments of Russia's elite. Only thanks to foreign revolution was their implicit worldview explicated in the form of an ideological doctrine.

The term "democracy" in Surkov's doctrine has the same meaning as the term "nationality" in Uvarov's. The latter's "nationalism" did not mean popular sovereignty, whereas Surkov's interpretation of "democracy" has approximately the same relation to genuine democracy as did the "people's democracies" of Communist times. "Sovereign democracy" also reproduced ceteris paribus the internal policy of Nicholas I, adjusted for historical context. During Putin's second presidential term, the electoral process was sterilized, legislation against "extremism" (which means any unauthorized public activity) was tightened, non-governmental independent organizations were persecuted, anti-Western propaganda campaigns were conducted, pro-Kremlin youth mass and social organizations were created, and so forth.

These counterrevolutionary tactics were obviously redundant and overdone. Equally excessive was the response of Nicholas I's government to the tiny handful of opposition intellectuals, such as the Slavophiles and the Westerners. Then and now the Russian government's fear was genuine, although not especially clear-headed. The most instructive lesson of Nicholas I's time, however, is that the effectiveness of counterrevolutionary policies remains to be seen.

4.6 WHY NOT RUSSIA OR WHEN RUSSIA?

The theory of revolution openly admits that it cannot foresee if and when revolutions will occur. Revolutions can be described but not predicted. Always

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surprising for their contemporaries, they occur when they are least expected. Structural preconditions of revolution do not necessarily produce revolution. The ripeness of these structural factors seems obvious only after a revolution has occurred.

The situation in Russia looked stable until the end of 2011. However, the mass manifestations in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities starting after the parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011, cast doubt on long-term regional stability and opened up a new political perspective, not excluding intimations of revolution. At the very least, the structural preconditions for revolution in Russia need to be reevaluated.

Although the Russian Federation never seemed fair, until autumn 2011, it at least gave the impression of effectiveness in several important respects. First, the state demonstrated a capacity to achieve economic goals. From 2003 to autumn 2008, Russia experienced an economic boom unprecedented in the post-Communist era. The boom is regularly associated with Putin's policies. In reality, the welcome rise in living standards owed more to a favorable external economic environment than to any actions by Russian authorities; but nobody seemed to care. Without the government's actions, economic growth would have probably been even more significant. Then the global economic crisis in 2008 seriously weakened confidence in the economic efficiency of the Russian state, although not fatally.

Second, Putin's Russia seemed to be successful in achieving its foreign policy goals. In this sense, the contrast with the Yeltsin era, perceived by Russian society as a period of national humiliation and disgrace, played an especially important role. (Painful memories of the 1990s made Putin's regime look good by comparison.)

Third, the Russian government hounded its actual and potential opponents with cruelty and sophistication. Society long looked favorably on this harshness. For several years, only small and marginal political groups, the radical Left and radical liberals, dared openly to oppose Putin, who was extremely popular. A sidelined opposition did not enjoy the sympathies of Russian society. More or less influential opposition political parties were marginalized (Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces) and even politically liquidated (Homeland).

Full and successful government control of television news provided further evidence of the effectiveness of the Russian state. Influential opposition media were present in all the countries where color revolutions broke out. In Russia, such media disappeared during Putin's first presidential term. This was a consequential development. Only nationally viewed television channels free to criticize the government could have replaced the muted and dissolved opposition parties.

Fall 2011 saw the political situation in Russia beginning to change dramatically. The parliamentary elections were widely taken as unfair and dishonest and provoked mass demonstrations. The legitimacy of the dominant party United Russia was critically undermined, and the legitimacy of key

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power-holding institutions was seriously weakened. Though in March 2012, Vladimir Putin was successfully elected president and the opposition couldn't really challenge him, for the first time in decades, Russian authorities faced a massive and revolutionary political threat. According to authoritative sociological and analytic research centers, an irreversible process of "delegitimation" of the regime has started in Russia – in fact, a moral and psychological revolution.

The Internet and social networks that proved influential alternatives to traditional mass media, including TV, played a great role in dissemination of this idea. New media served as an arena for free political discussions, played an important and successful role as antigovernment propaganda tools, and also helped to coordinate political protest.

What can we say about that other structural precondition of revolution, namely, a crisis of economic well-being? In the years of prosperity, the "golden rain" of oil prices watered Russia unevenly. Nevertheless, all social strata benefited from it to some degree. The lower classes, who, by some estimates, make up a third of the population, received massive subsidies. The Russian poor are entirely dependent on public assistance and exhibit pronounced paternalistic attitudes. As a consequence, those who live under the poverty line do not constitute an opposition to authority but rather serve as its stable support. During parliamentary and presidential elections, they voted for United Russia and Putin.

However, a new wave of global economic crisis starting in 2012 prejudices an ability of Russian authorities to fulfill their social programs and promises given during elections. Russian society is feeling a sharp increase in fiscal pressure and faces dismantlement of the last remainders of welfare state. Together these factors could prove enough to awaken the politically passive strata of the population. At the same time, Putin's "stability pact" – renunciation of political ambitions in exchange for economic growth and personal prosperity – is losing its appeal for the middle class and the large city population. There are no visible prospects for either economic growth or increased incomes now. The strengthening of administrative and fiscal pressure leaves small and medium businesses with no room for development. If the nature of the election campaign caused moral and political protest among urban middle classes, the Kremlin's social and economic policies, multiplied by monstrous corruption, threatens the very foundation of their existence.

For the first time in a decade, the social and financial risks of open opposition to the authorities proved acceptable to the urban middle classes, and the value of Putin's stability began to give in to the values of freedom and justice. The level of political activity of society as a whole has increased dramatically and shows no tendency to decline, and mass sentiments are becoming ever more radical.

A crisis of leadership, the opposition's ideological weakness, and relative cohesion of the ruling elite are the three factors that constrain the development of political protest in Russia. The large majority of the opposition leaders for

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one reason or another are not acceptable to most of society and even to the participants of mass protests themselves. Their political antirating is usually much higher than their positive rating. In this situation, Putin remains the only viable alternative to the majority of the general public. Meanwhile, the country lacks an oppositional ideology. That is to say, it lacks the one structural precondition of revolution that could justify the loss of livelihood and even life that a public protest might conceivably provoke. Neither left, nor liberal, nor nationalist ideology can mobilize the whole society (or even a large part of it) to confront the ruling power. Although they know well enough what they do not want, people in Russia have only a vague idea about what they do want. In Russia, generally speaking, no broad cultural frame exists that can lend meaning to radical change and unite society on the pathway to it. A myth of freedom and justice, which could justify change, is less influential than the conservative myths of stability and order that justify the status quo.

Russian society remains highly atomized. Horizontal ties are scarce and weak, as are developed forms of civic solidarity. The Russian elite actively discourages all forms of civil activity and the emergence of independent civic associations. Russia's rulers consider the passivity of society as the primary guarantee of their hold on political power.

No external influence can either compensate for the absence of popular oppositional ideologies or mobilize civic activism inside Russia. Distrust and the presumption of guilt characterize the Russian government's view of international and Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Exceptions are NGOs and (pseudo)civil activities that have been created by the government and are controlled by it in an effort to simulate civil society. The most eminent example of this mimicry of political life is the Public Chamber.

Western sociocultural influence has a paradoxical effect in Russia, sharply distinguishing the country from the other post-Soviet states. The Russians share fundamental values associated with the West, have internalized Western consumer values, and believe that Russia is a European country. At the same time, unlike other post-Soviet states, and unlike Russia itself at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, for modern Russia, the West no longer incarnates a normative model or an inspiring example.

Even if mass mobilization were to occur, the Russian population's ability to defend its interests would encounter cohesive elite resistance. States supported by cohesive elites, as many scholars have emphasized, are generally invulnerable to revolution from below. The threat of revolution looms only when the elite themselves do not want to support the regime or are riven by discord over whether or not to do so, and if yes, then how (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001, 2003). The Russian elite show no signs of suffering a fundamental split. While differences within their ranks increased during 2011–12, these differences have not led to polarization or the formation of elite groups with sharply differing views about the desirable social order. The factor that contributes most to a revolutionary outbreak (or at least to an acute state crisis) is not

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intra-elite conflict itself but an emergence of elite factions with radically different programs.

At the same time, the experience of revolutions shows that polarization and formation of elite groups with entirely different ideas of the desired social order structure can occur in a short time. And in this way, Russia is not an exception, being the country where notable ideological and sociocultural differentiation – a potential basis for the formation of openly opposing elite factions – is traditional among the elite. However, any crystallization of such factions can occur only with further growth of mass protests and a frontal collision with the authorities. Without this condition, elite groups hostile to Putin won't dare to come out flat against the regime, out of fear of reprisals. Although they are already covertly stimulating the protest movement, it is still only a *Fronde*, not an open opposition.

One way or another, there can be no successful revolution without an alliance of a faction of elite and society. However, an alliance of the liberal elite unpopular in Russia and unpopular opposition leaders will certainly find no credit in Russian society. The public has fresh bad memories of the 1990s, when exactly such a union defined Russian politics. In turn, the liberal elite and counterelite demonstrate elitist attitudes and deep fear of public involvement in politics, as it threatens their strategic positions.

If an acute political crisis were to arise, the psychological profile of the Russian elite would be a key factor in determining the outcome. Is the Russian elite ready to resort to massive and brutal violence against the Russian street, or not? In the color revolutions, the authorities did not dare confront the opposition. They were afraid to assume responsibility for massive bloodshed. To avoid such an outcome, they surrendered. Characteristically, starting from late 2011, the society perceived crackdowns against participants of mass demonstrations as unfair and unreasonable. It is dialogue and compromise that society demands of authorities, not confrontation and violence.

To summarize, only two of the six preconditions of revolution are present in Russia today – a crisis of state power and a crisis of national welfare. Another three factors – division in the elite, union of the part of the elite and the people, and an articulated opposition ideology – are still more potential, although with the rise in the political temperature, they can easily become actual. Such factors as external influences in the case of Russia hardly have any significant value.

4.7 CONCLUSIONS

Modern Russia is drawn into a large-scale national crisis with increasing force. However, its development will not necessarily lead to a revolution. At least some of the key structural factors of the revolution have not yet emerged in Russia. Nonetheless, in general, the situation in Russia rather more predisposes to the position of agnosticism than to unambiguous judgments about the future.

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As international experience shows, dramatic social and political changes most often start suddenly and are surprising for the observers. And certainly no revolution has ever been predicted.

Notes

1. I am grateful for this idea to Adam Przeworski and Boris Makarenko.
2. The mechanisms by which elections may provoke a revolution have been specified by Weingast (1997) and Fearon (2006) and applied to the color revolutions by Tucker (2007).

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