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Color revolutions: Democratization, Hidden Influence or Warfare?





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Abstract

The crisis in Ukraine that began on November 21, 2013 after the Ukrainian government's decision to not to sign an association agreement with the EU raised the issue of the so called "color revolutions". The term was coined to describe mass protests against the political elite that broke out in the post-Soviet region, a decade after the breakdown of the USSR. The most active, well-organized and successful "color revolutions" happened in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005). In Russia "color revolutions" have been interpreted as an instrument of information warfare and the concealed use of military force which are considered to be a threat to international security. In the context of the crisis in Ukraine in 2013/2014, Russian political and military leaders have openly stated that a "color revolution" is a new approach to warfare. The article aims to outline a geopolitical perspective on "color revolutions" developed by Western academics and social activists since these findings and ideas have been echoed in the Russian view. Its aim also is to explain "color revolutions" from the perspective of Russian political, academic and military thought, and to indicate the main steps Russia is taking to protect itself from "color revolutions". The article's main finding is that Russia's attitude towards "color revolutions" is dual – on the one hand it "unmasks" and criticizes the West for using hidden tools of influence, but at the same time it adapts and uses similar methods. Russian "counter-color revolution" strategies combine a set of soft and hard methods that are being used to preclude the possibility of a "color revolution" within Russia and to pursue its interests abroad. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 has been studied as a case of Russian "counter-color revolution".

Keywords: Color Revolutions; Russia; Ukraine; Warfare.

1. Introduction

"Color revolutions" can be defined as non-violent mass protests aimed at changing the existing quasi-democratic governments through elections (Baev, 2011: 5). Basically, the term "color revolution" is a metaphor that is used to describe a peculiar phenomenon. First, it could be questioned whether a "color revolution" really is a revolution, because the concept "revolution" includes claims for the creation of a new socio-political order. In contrast, "color revolutions" are largely limited to the changing of the political elite within the existing political system. Second, the word "color" highlights the importance of well-crafted and targeted political symbolism as a mass mobilization tool. For instance, the image of a fist (Picture 1) was first used in Serbia, and then in other "color revolutions" in the post-Soviet space. It was also present in the "Arab Spring" protests in the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere. Such unifying symbols of mass protest as bulldozers in Serbia, roses in Georgia, the color orange in Ukraine, tulips in Kyrgyzstan, jasmine in Tunisia, the cedar in Lebanon and others have also been significant.

There are two main explanations for the "color revolution" in the academic literature. One research direction uses the perspective of the clash of geopolitical interests between the

East and the West after the Cold War, but the other one focuses on the issues of opposition movements – how they have become more effective in achieving their objectives (Tucker, 2007: 539). These viewpoints mark two broader frames for “color revolutions” – one supports the optimistic view of “color revolutions” as a further process of democratization, but the other is rather critical and highlights foreign interference in the internal matters of independent states.

Figure 1
The Symbol of “Color Revolutions”



The critique of “color revolutions” is based on the perspective of a geopolitical struggle, according to which it is a Western tool for broadening and strengthening global influence. Such view is rooted in the fact that the unifying ideology of “color revolutions” in different countries is “democracy”, which is a fundamental political value of the West. By promoting its political model, the West can also increase its influence globally. The geopolitical approach is very attractive and beneficial to Russia, but similar ideas have also been expressed by Western scholars, journalists and social activists (Sussman 2006, Barker 2006, Sussman & Krader, 2008). Therefore, the Russian view on “color revolutions” is to some extent based on the critical perspective of Western authors, making the Russian narrative persuasive outside the borders of Russia as well.

For example, during his meeting with the heads of international news agencies, Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, assumed that Russia’s position in regard to the annexation of Crimea was also supported by a large part of the population of European countries, contrary to their governments’ policies (Novosti Ukraini, 2015, June 1). Russia’s strategy of targeting Western populations, bypassing their governments (Putin, 2013, September 11), turned out to be effective in the prevention of a military intervention in Syria during the chemical weapons crisis in 2013. In the end, the US and Great Britain abstained from intended military strikes against Syria as a result of very low support among their domestic populations. Whether V. Putin used the sentiment of the Western public to build up his international image or whether he

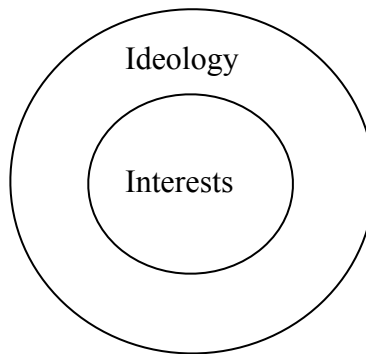
actually influenced it, could be the subject of debate, but undoubtedly the short-term outcome was favorable to him. The same pattern could be used in the context of the “color revolutions”, because there is a gap between the official policies of the West and the views of the critical thinking within society.

A critical view of the “color revolutions” in the West is rooted in the recognition that the US has an extensive history of interference in the internal affairs of other countries (Robinson, 1996; Barker 2006, Blum 2004, Blum 2013). From such a point of view, some Western scholars use phrases with a negative connotation like “destabilization strategy” (Barker 2006: 4) and “electoral intervention” (Sussman 2006; Sussman & Krader, 2008) to describe the process of promoting democracy in other countries. On the one hand, the assistance for democracy as a goal may seem to be important enough to justify the means, but this critical view results from the skepticism that Western economic interests are being implemented globally under the guise of democratic ideals (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 92). The most important of these interests are: “the transnational economic integration; control over regional energy production and distribution; NATO membership and security initiatives; and the isolation of Russia” (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 94).

Doubts about the true intentions of Western promotion of democracy and operations for the protection of human rights in foreign countries are strengthened by the now generally recognized fact that the invasion in Iraq in 2003 was a war for oil (Juhasz, 2013, April 15). But, officially it was communicated as a war for disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, ending terrorism and freeing the Iraqi people. Such a fatal discrepancy between words and deeds not only weakens the position of the West, but works in favor of its adversaries, including Russia.

It can be conceptualized that the implementation of interests in foreign countries can be done more effectively in a hidden manner; by covering them under an ideology that morally justifies interference (Picture 2). An ideology that is based on globally recognized and accepted values serves as a tool for justifying interventions internationally. It also turns part of the population of a target state into voluntary supporters of larger geopolitical players that promote this ideology. In this way the compliance of a country with the interests of larger geopolitical players can be achieved even without applying military force. Although this concept is being developed in the context of criticism of the West, later in the text, it will be shown that this model can also be applied to explain the actions of Russia.

Figure 2
The conceptual model of hidden foreign interference



One of the arguments in favor of the view that democratization is not the ultimate aim of “color revolutions”, is the quality of democracy in the countries where the political elite has been changed as a result of mass uprisings. In this regard W. I. Robinson (Robinson, 1996) develops the idea that the goal of US democracy assistance is to promote polyarchy as opposed to popular democracy. According to W. I. Robinson, polyarchy is a system governed by a small group, instead of majority rule, which is a basic principle of democracy. In polyarchy, mass participation in decision-making is limited to the choice of leadership in elections, which are controlled by competing political elites (Robinson 1996: 623-624). The goal of promoting polyarchy is to overthrow a dictatorship without developing more fundamental change, because polyarchy as an elite form of government is an effective social control mechanism in the circumstances of globalization (Robinson 1996: 626-627). In the context of “color revolutions” this view finds support in the fact that in the countries where mass protests have been successful in terms of the changing of the political elite, there has not been significant progress in democratization afterwards (Bunce & Wolchik, 2009: 96).

“Color revolutions” are carried out according to a certain pattern which was present in almost all cases (Beissinger, 2007: 261), and which show a high degree of foreign involvement. The most obvious indicator of foreign presence is the funding that the West has invested in protest movements. The officially available data about US financial resources in “color revolutions” in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine gives an idea of the extent of the involvement: the “Bulldozer Revolution” in Serbia – 64 million USD; the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia – USD 525,000.00; and the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine – more than 35 million USD (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 98-100). In the context of the crisis in Ukraine in 2013/2014, Victoria J. Nuland, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the US Department of State,

admitted that since 1991 the US has invested more than 5 billion USD in Ukraine for the development of democracy (US-Ukraine Foundation, 2013).

Delivery of funding and other forms of support for opposition movements took place through transnational organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the G. Soros Open Society Institute, and others. These are specific privately run, but publicly funded organizations that the US had set up for the promotion of democracy abroad from the beginning of the Cold War. The democracy promoting organizations were used in the war of ideas with the Soviet Union to strengthen the geostrategic position of the US (Carothers, 1999: 30). The Reagan administration used the example of German political party foundations that facilitated democratic transitions in Spain and Portugal for the promotion of democracy as an ideology (Carothers, 1999: 30). These foundations are specific transnational actors that use the non-governmental organization image, but are associated with German foreign policies (Dakowska, 2005: 150-169). Transnational democracy promotion organizations played an important role in "color revolutions" in the former Soviet bloc countries, as well.

Foreign diplomats and influential officials have actively participated in the process of consolidation of the opposition (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 96) that is one of the important prerequisites for the success of a "color revolution". The evidence that US officials are modeling the "post-revolutionary" landscape of the political elite in foreign countries can be found in a leaked phone call between V. Nuland and Geoffrey Pyatt, the US Ambassador to Ukraine. In the conversation V. Nuland and G. Pyatt discuss the composition of the interim government of Ukraine in the context of the crisis in Ukraine in 2013/2014, as if they were the actual decision-makers (BBC, 2014, February 7). It has not been denied that the leaked phone call is authentic; therefore, taken out of context, the content and tone of voice of the conversation may be used in "counter propaganda" against the West. It serves as a demonstration that mass protests aimed at increasing civic participation in politics do not lead to greater self-determination for people, because the new political elite is, to a large extent, constructed by more influential geopolitical players.

International support is also very important for the organization of large scale "exit poll" surveys at the polls (Wilson, 2005: 186), because "exit poll" results give reason to argue that the official results of the elections are fraudulent. They serve as a reason to mobilize broad mass protests. In this respect, it is important to emphasize that the electoral context is very favorable for "color revolutions", because it is the le-

gitimate time for the process of changing the political elite. If there are significant violations, there is a high probability of achieving a review of the election results due to internal protests and international pressure. This is one of the factors that could explain the stalemate of the protests in Ukraine in 2013/2014, as opposed to the success of the "Orange Revolution" in 2004, because Euromaidan protests were not related to the election. Thus, the change of the political elite without democratic elections gives rise to discussions about the legitimacy of the interim government of Ukraine, which Russia uses as one of the arguments in the formulation of its narrative of Euromaidan events in Ukraine (Kremlin, 2014, March 18).

Youth organizations usually take the leading role in organizing protests in "color revolutions" – *Otpor* (Resistance) in Serbia, *Kmara* (Enough) in Georgia, *Pora* (It's time) in Ukraine and *KelKel* (Rebirth) in Kyrgyzstan, for instance. The Serbian *Otpor* must be highlighted, because it was the "first mover" of the "color revolutions" and its experience has been used afterwards in other countries. In 2004, the leaders of *Otpor* established *The Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies* (CANVAS), the mission of which is to spread knowledge about methods of non-violent struggle around the world. CANVAS experts have organized training in more than 40 countries in different regions of the world. Special mention should be made of their participation in the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia and the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine, as well as their support for the "Cedar Revolution" in Lebanon and the "April 6" youth movement in Egypt, which points to two important things. First, knowledge about the techniques for the organization and management of mass protests is a very important prerequisite for the achievement of goals. Second, in the context of "color revolutions", the diffusion of knowledge from country to country is obvious. There is a clear link between the post-Soviet "color revolutions" and popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, in terms of the mass protest organization techniques.

The methods and principles of commercial marketing and corporate branding have been widely used in "color revolutions". One of the founders of *Otpor* admitted that they have been using the *Coca-Cola* brand as a model for the protest movement (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 103). It turned out to be true, that in politics, strong brands influence people more than charismatic leaders. For instance, the symbol of a fist (Picture 1) now serves as a global brand for mass protests and is therefore present at mass protests in so many countries. At the same time, a critical observer may consider the fact that global brands are managed; they are not formed by themselves. In this respect, there is also evidence of US involvement in "color revolutions". For example, the professional application of branding and marketing principles in the Serbian revolu-

tion took place with the assistance of American marketing experts and funding. The efficiency of the “Bulldozer Revolution” was achieved by testing elements of the campaign with sociological research methods (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 102-103) which requires a high level of competence.

The role of the Western media also has to be mentioned as an important influential factor that constructed the desired picture of reality (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 94) and helped to mobilize mass protesters (Sussman & Krader, 2008: 105). The post-Soviet “color revolutions” took place before the boom of the social media, but the “Arab Spring” mass riots that flared up in Tunisia in 2010 and took over Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, Jordan, Oman, Kuwait and other countries in the following year, are often referred to as “twitter revolutions”. New communication technologies played a significant role as mass mobilization tools during the protests in the Middle East and North Africa. That’s why social media also has to be mentioned as a contributing factor in “color revolutions”.

In gathering the main points about the geopolitical perspective on “color revolutions”, it can be concluded that the following elements are present in the implementation of “color revolutions”: the interests of global or regional powers; a globally appealing ideology; mass protests; foreign funding of protest movements; transnational ideology promoting organizations; diplomatic pressure; “exit poll” surveys; local youth organizations; knowledge of protest movement organization and promotion techniques; traditional and social media. A large number of these elements are being used in Russia’s reaction to the “color revolutions” and in “counterattack” activities that will be analyzed further in the text (Table 1). But for now, it is possible to make a general conclusion that Western involvement in the processes of “color revolutions” is undeniable. As a result, this provides a solid foundation for speculation about the actual purpose and the true nature of “color revolutions” which is now being developed in Russian political, academic and military thought.

The Russian View on “Color Revolutions”

The perspective on “color revolutions” and the choice of the corresponding discourse, depends on an observer’s value system. One can choose words that construct a diametrically opposed attitude toward the situation in describing the same phenomena. The key to the interpretation of “color revolutions” is whether they are viewed through the prism of democratization or not. For instance, one could call it a “public uprising against an anti-democratic political elite” or the “creation of controlled chaos”, a “fight for democracy” or “the destabilization of a country”. Each way of de-

scribing events will construct different realities. In the Russian view on “color revolutions”, the democratic perspective is cast aside resulting in a narrative that is radically opposite to the official Western interpretations.

General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, defines “color revolutions” as a “form of non-violent change of power in a country by outside manipulation of the protest potential of the population in conjunction with political, economic, humanitarian and other non-military means” (Cordesman, 2014, May 28). If we compare V. Gerasimov’s definition with the Western understanding of “color revolutions” (Baev, 2011: 5), it can be concluded that, from both views, a change of government is the aim of mass protests. But the key difference is that in a pro-Western frame it is a step in the process of democratization, whereas V. Gerasimov sees “color revolutions” as a non-military means for achieving politico-military goals in opposing states.

From the point of view of Russian information warfare theory, “color revolutions” are considered to be an information warfare method. One of the ways in which information warfare works, is based on the analogy of a computer virus. To win in information warfare, it is necessary to infiltrate elements that obey foreign commands, into the command system of an adversary (Rastorguyev). In the context of “color revolutions” it means that the post-revolutionary political elite are an alien element in the command system of a country which executes the instructions of foreign governments at the expense of the country’s own interests.

To strengthen this point of view in public discourse, various Russian web sites and blogs publish materials about the opposition leaders’ connections with the US. For instance, the wife of Viktor Yushenko (post-Orange revolution president of Ukraine from 2005 till 2010) Katerina Yushenko, is believed to be a spy of the US, because she was born in the US and has been a former U.S State Department official (Genshtab; Rupor.info, 2009, December 23). Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the Prime Minister of the Ukrainian government that was set up in February 2014, is also believed to be an agent of the US and NATO (I.ua, 2014, March 14). Similar conspiracies have also been developed about the leaders of the opposition movement in Serbia, Georgia and elsewhere. V. Putin has, however, publicly emphasized that: “We will not serve the interests of others” (Novosti Ukraini, 2014, June 1), thus underlining that Russia is free from Western influence.

Russian academics and experts believe that the “color revolutions” give the US the ability to manipulate other countries. The belief is that this is being achieved

through a variety of instruments – NGOs, charities, foundations, national and religious movements, criminal groups, mass media, Internet (Tkachenko, 2011: 12–13). In their view, the West has created an effective mechanism of interference in the domestic politics of foreign countries. All of these tools form a network that can be activated to destabilize the domestic policy situation if the local political elite do not pursue the interests of global leaders (Minasjan&Voskanjan, 2013). This problem has been raised at a political level in Russia. In the addresses of ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia, V. Putin called for the necessity to raise international discussion about the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, because destabilization of the political situation can lead to an illegitimate and undemocratic change of power that has negative consequences (Kremlin, 2014, June 1).

It can be generalized that a “*coup d’etat*” is the essence of the “color revolution” according to Russian understanding (Ostromenskiy, 2011, October 23). Such a formulation of “color revolutions” has a negative connotation, because the term “*coup d’etat*” is used to describe the illegal removal of a government, often backed up or carried out by the military. By formulating a “color revolution” as “*coup d’etat*”, the Russian experts, opinion leaders and politicians construct a frame which opposes and challenges the idea of “color revolutions” as a wave of democratization. And even more – they call in to question Western style democracy as a global value and the role model for politics all over the World. Thus Y. Ponamareva concludes that rapid democratization in countries without traditions of democracy destroys centuries of existing public order and leads to a sharp polarization of society and a destabilization of political power (Ponamareva, 2012: 42).

At a political level the US policy of promoting democracy was questioned in V. Putin’s letter to the American people, published in the *New York Times* on September 11, 2013, in the context of the Syrian chemical weapons crisis. V. Putin offers a view of the instability in Syria as an armed fight for power among different groups instead of a process of democratization. Together with the reasoning regarding strikes against Syrian forces, he also challenges the idea about American exceptionalism. V. Putin highlights that there are countries with different democratic traditions that result in policies different from Western liberal democracy also having a right to exist. In his opinion, current US foreign policy has led to the perception of America as a threat:

It is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States. Is it in America’s long-term interest? I doubt it. Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on

brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan “you’re either with us or against us. (Putin, 2013, September 11)

According to the military doctrine of the Russian Federation, one of the basic military dangers to Russia is “an attempt to destabilize the situation in various states and regions and undermine strategic stability” (Kremlin, 2010, February 5). Although the danger is not specifically named as a “color revolution”, its formulation refers to the way in which “color revolutions” are being carried out. The course of a “color revolution” can be structured as a five-step process: 1) peaceful mass protests; 2) the provocation and discrediting of the government in power; 3) the neutralization of power; 4) social and political chaos; 5) a takeover of power (Glazyev). To sum it up – the destabilization of domestic policy may lead to a change of government in the interests of more influential geopolitical players or it can get stuck in a phase of social and political chaos if the government in power does not concede. In the latter case, it may lead to civil war, like in the cases of Libya and Syria.

The idea of a “color revolution” as a threat to the Russian Federation is rather widespread. It was also developed by analysts at the Russian Academy of Military Sciences. According to their findings, in addition to nuclear weapons and the development of modern military technology, some of the most important threats to Russia are the informative and other such destructive activities. They are used for the creation of controlled chaos in other countries by provoking different types of unrest, forcing unwanted governments and destroying their internal stability (Miranovich, 2014, January 30). The view of a “color revolution” as a threat to Russia can be found in academic writings as well, where it is expressed in a more direct and clear manner, as “Russia is the final destination of “color revolutions” since the strategic goal of the West is to immerse Russia in a democratic chaos and to bring it to its final fragmentation” (Ponamareva, 2012: 39).

The destabilizing results of the “Arab Spring” protests in the Middle East and North Africa, especially the civil wars in Libya and Syria, give rise to Russian arguments that a “color revolution” is not only an information warfare method, but also an adaptive approach to the use of military force.

Strategic Non-Violence vs. “Color Revolution” Warfare

Russians add a military dimension to the concept of a “color revolution” that makes it fundamentally different from the one originally worked out by the pro-democracy activists. Strategic non-violence is the basic principle of “color revolution” movements for very practical considerations. According to the CANVAS guide to non-

violent struggle, it is crucial to maintain non-violent discipline because of three main reasons: 1) non-violent resistance is sympathetic to many people and increases the likelihood that more and more people will join the movement; 2) it will destroy the credibility and legitimacy of the government in power if it attempts to suppress a protest movement violently; 3) the non-violence of protesters helps to co-opt representatives from power structures such as the military and police (CANVAS, 2007: 88-89). On the contrary, if representatives from the opposition movement perform acts of violence, it gives an opponent a legitimate excuse to crack down on the movement (CANVAS, 2007: 164-165). Therefore, for the successful outcome of a “color revolution”, it is important that it does not escalate into violence. Of course, the opposite is true as well – if you want to counter a “color revolution”, it is necessary to escalate violence. It is a simple, but fundamental principle that explains why Russian military experts define a “color revolution” as a type of warfare.

To put it in a wider context, one has to pay attention to V. Putin’s thesis about the formation of the polycentric system of international relations (Putin, 2014, May 23) as opposed to the idea of the global dominance of the US (Brzezinski, 1997). Russia is attempting to counterbalance the influence of the West in the region where it has strategic interests. If we assume that a “color revolution” is a hidden tool of influence of the West, then the logical conclusion is that Russia has to stop the successful course of protest movements domestically and in the states that are important to Russia. To alert others that Russia will oppose Western expansion with any means, V. Putin openly calls for giving up “color revolutions” as an outdated method for new circumstances: “(O)bviously, the modern challenges and threats require rejection of archaic logic of geopolitical zero-sum games, attempts to impose on other peoples alien recipes and value systems being implemented also through the “color revolutions”” (Putin, 2014, May 23).

The moral grounds for the rejection of Western dominance are found in the denial of Western style democracy as a global value, but actual resistance takes place by breaking the strategy of non-violent resistance. In other words, the emergence of a polycentric system of international relations leads to increased authoritarianism and violence. Conflict does not result in violence if the government voluntarily resigns, but if the regime in power resists mass riots, then destabilization can develop into large scale hostilities. The military operations initiated under the circumstances of a “color revolution” are based on the concealed use of military force. In the same way as the interests of influential geopolitical players can be implemented under the guise of civil

activism and non-violent resistance, the military involvement of superpowers is indirect and/or covert and it is carried out through local opposition forces.

It is important to note that the Russian concept of “color revolution” warfare which is presented by Russian experts as a critique of Western military interventions can be actually read as a prescription for Russia’s own activities. The concept worked out in the West is based on the idea of non-violent resistance, but it is in Russia’s interests to counter “color revolutions”, which can be done by escalating violence or balancing the West with equal military force. At the same time, it has to be admitted that the support of the West for opposition forces has continued when the clash has escalated into military conflict as well. For instance, in the Syrian civil war, the US and Saudi Arabia have supplied armament to rebel groups (Knickmeyer, Abi-Habib, Entous, 2014, April 18). On the contrary, global players which want to oppose the West can stand on the side of the government as was the case in Syria where Russia, China and Iran supported Syrian President Bashar Assad politically, militarily and economically. This way “color revolution” warfare opens the way for using third parties as a battlefield for the conflicting interests of global and regional powers.

According to V. Gerasimov, the concealed use of military force in “color revolutions” takes place in the conflicting form of military training of rebels by foreign instructors; the supply of weapons and resources to anti-government forces; the application of mercenaries and private military companies; reinforcement of opposition units with foreign fighters. If the non-violent change of government fails, there is a search for a pretext for a military operation, for instance, protection of civilians and foreign citizens or accusing a conflicting party of using weapons of mass destruction. For influential geopolitical forces, an adaptive approach to the use of military force provides such benefits as maintaining a positive image in the international community, avoiding the substantial costs of military operations, and preventing numerous casualties. But the consequences of military support to anti-governmental forces and open military intervention are an expanded range of threats to international security: mercenarism; terrorism; extremism; transborder crime (Cordesman, 2014, May 28). In the case of the crisis in Ukraine in 2013/2014, pro-Russian unrest can be defined as an “anti-governmental force” therefore the “color revolution” warfare concept of V. Gerasimov may be mirrored back as Russia’s own strategy of countering increasing Western influence in Ukraine.

Colonel-General Vladimir Zarudnitsky, Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, mentions five features that

characterize the differences of “color revolution” warfare from traditional war. Firstly, the boundaries between defense and attack, the strategy and tactics that are characteristic for traditional war, are being erased. There is no front and rear. Fighting does not unfold in a particular area or in any direction, but throughout the country, as a network. Secondly, military operations are conducted mainly in urban areas and settlements. Groups of mercenaries and gangs deliberately use civilians as “human shields”, which leads to heavy losses among the civilian population not involved in the conflict.

Thirdly, military actions go beyond international law and take on the character of a war without rules. “Color revolutions” create the conditions for non-compliance with the international law regulating the conduct of war. This is due to the fact that the armed groups of the opposition and mercenaries are entities that are outside the legal framework and therefore take no responsibility for violations of international law. The failure to comply with the laws and customs of war make it extremely ruthless and brutal. Fourthly, “color revolution” warfare actively involves criminal structures. Impunity and permissiveness leads to the fact that military actions are carried out by bandits and terrorist methods. Terror takes on a massive character. Fifthly, the extensive use of private military forces and special operations forces, because there is a need for military formations that hide the explicit intervention of one state in the affairs of another in “color revolutions”. Private military companies are also widely involved in the recruitment of mercenaries. They conduct combat operations in an unprincipled manner that lead to many dead and wounded among the civilian population. V. Zarudnitsky sums it all up by concluding that “(W)ars initiated within the “color revolutions” are carried out in the most miserable ways. From the point of view of international law and morality, they are more consistent with the Middle Ages than the twenty-first century.” (Zarudnitsky, 2014, May 23).

Escalating and maintaining violent conflicts by supporting or artificially constructing one of the conflicting sides in the internal conflicts of foreign countries, without direct military intervention, is one of the strategies that Russia can use to counter the geopolitical expansion of the West. The nature of “color revolution” warfare, as it is characterized by V. Zarudnitsky, and experienced in the current wars in Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere, creates a bleak picture of the future, if the process of the establishment of a polycentric system of international relations continues the way it has started. Russia’s “counter-color revolution” strategies are, however, not just based on military force. The soft dimension is also very important in pursuing Russia’s interests.

Non-Military Tools for Countering “Color Revolutions”

By its very nature, a “color revolution” is a soft tool for achieving political ends in the sense that the change of government must happen without violence. Therefore, to be able to counter the West effectively, Russia is also using non-military elements that are present in pro-Western “color revolutions” (Table 1). Not all of the elements which can be determined in “color revolutions” can be used by Russia, because some of them stem from the genuine nature of democracy that is contradictory to an authoritarian regime.

Table 1
Russian Response to the Main Elements of “Color Revolutions”

Elements of “color revolutions”	Pro-western use in “color revolutions”	Russian use in countering “color revolutions”
Interests	<i>Must be specified in each case</i>	
Ideology	Democracy	Protection of the rights of Russians, antifascism, multiculturalism etc.
Mass protests	Pro-democracy protests and rallies	Pro-government rallies
Youth organizations	<i>Otpor</i> (Serbia), <i>Pora</i> (Ukraine) etc.	<i>Nashi</i>
Transnational ideology promoting organizations	USAID, NED, Open Society Institute etc.	Restrictions on foreign organizations operating in Russia
		Russkiy Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo, Gorchakov Foundation, World without Nazism etc.
Foreign funding	~ 50 billion USD	~ 2 billion USD
Know-how for the organization of mass protests	The methods and principles of commercial marketing and corporate branding applied to politics	Political technologies
Media	The Western media	Russian state media

For example, the “exit poll surveys” during elections are a method which is crucial for pro-democracy activists, but are not necessary for the defenders of an authoritarian government. Still, many of the “color revolution” elements are used by Russia in its own interpretation to provide a counterweight to the West at an informative level

and to promote its own interests. The interests and ideology of Russia will be analyzed in the case of the annexation of Crimea, but the rest of the main non-violent “counter-color revolution” elements will be outlined in a broader context.

Mass rallies in support of the government

Russia was the closest to a “color revolution” during the anti-Putin protests from 2011 till 2013, which started as a reaction to the fraudulent Duma election in 2011. The series of protests continued until 2013 and were aimed at protesting against the third term of V. Putin’s presidency, for fair elections and for the rights of the arrested and punished protest movement leaders. The electoral context in which the mass protests took place fits within the general pattern of “color revolutions”, therefore the political elite in power had to react for fear of further escalation of the destabilization. Alongside the use of the judiciary and police against the leaders of the protest movements, the pro-Putin rallies turned out to be a very effective way of neutralizing the protesters, because it helped to demonstrate that there was a large part of population supporting the government.

Even if the pro-government rallies were carried out with the heavy use of administrative resources, it still served as a public demonstration and excellent propaganda material for the state controlled media broadcasts that different opinions exist within the public. The demonstrations in support of the existing government were evidence that there wasn’t just one conflict between the people and the political elite. Pro-government rallies make the situation more complicated, making the removal of an existing government much more difficult. It is a simple, but powerful non-violent tool of resisting a “color-revolution”, because there is a crowd against a crowd, and not the people against the government. Pro-government protests also challenge the pattern of “color revolutions” by raising a question – how many protesters are enough to force the government in power to resign legitimately?

The “Nashi” youth movement

Youth are an important segment in catalyzing mass protests. Therefore, one of the steps that Russia took for the protection of its interests after the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, was the establishment of the *Nashi* (Ours) anti-fascist youth movement in 2005. The goal of the movement, as formulated in the *Nashi* manifesto, provides evidence that it was created as a Russian soft power tool:

“Our goal is to make Russia a global leader of the twenty-first century. We do not mean Russia's leadership as a military-political domination over other countries

and peoples, but as Russia's influence in the world, based on the attractiveness of the Russian culture, lifestyle, and political, economic and social structure.” (*Nashi*).

Nashi was active at organizing and implementing various projects directed at the involvement of youth and promoting its ideology, but some of its activities and the methods used have discredited the image of the organization. It was accused of recruiting skinheads and hooligans to attack rival groups (Whewell, 2006, July 12), that gradually led to the comparison of the *Nashi* movement with Hitler’s Youth organization. In public discourse its name was ironically transformed to “*Nashisti*”, which is a reference to the Russian word “fascists”. The youth movement also created problems in Russia’s relations with the West, because of its activities abroad. For example, the actions of *Nashi* in Estonia, during the unrest regarding the transfer of the *Bronze Soldier* in 2007, were perceived as a threat to the national security of a foreign country. As a result the *Nashi* movement has now lost its importance and there is a debate going on regarding its reorganization or transformation into a party, but its history is still evidence of Russia’s deliberate steps in countering the influence of the West, by mirroring the tools used in pro-democracy movements.

Transnational Ideology Promoting Organizations

Taking into consideration the efficiency of seemingly non-governmental international organizations as foreign policy instruments, Russia is working in two directions – defence and attack. The defense measures are targeted at limiting the operations of foreign transnational organizations in Russia. After the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, Russia restricted the activities of local and international NGOs substantially. In 2006, amendments were made to legislation that made it possible to refuse the registration of an NGO if “its goals pose a threat to Russia's sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, national unity and national interests” (Council of Europe, 2012).

In response to the anti-Putin protests in 2012, further changes were made to the legislation, determining that NGOs that receive foreign funding are classified as “foreign agents”. These organizations have an obligation to present themselves in the public sphere as “NGOs, conducting foreign agent functions” (Council of Europe, 2012). According to the report of Yuriy Chaika, the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation, one NGO was registered as a “foreign agent” in 2014, but the Prosecutor’s Office identified 24 organizations corresponding to that status. Therefore Y. Chaika is proposing further amendments to the legislation that would allow the registration of “foreign

agents” not only at the request of NGOs, but also by judicial decision (Chaika, 2014, April 29).

At the same time, being aware of the operating efficiency of such organizations in the implementation of interests abroad, Russia itself has begun to set up and use transnational organizations. The main goals of these organizations are to build and maintain relationships with Russian compatriots abroad; to promote the Russian language and culture; to create a positive modern image of Russia; to strengthen Russia's view on history; to attract young people from abroad and others. The most important Russian organizations promoting its transnational ideology are the Russkiy Mir Foundation (founded in 2007), Rossotrudnichestvo (founded in 2008), the Gorchakov Foundation (founded in 2010), World without Nazism (founded in 2010), and the Russian International Affairs Council (founded in 2010). It is therefore, a two-faced game, because the activities of foreign organizations in Russia are restricted, whereas those of Russia's organizations abroad have become more intense in recent years.

Foreign funding

In an interview to German broadcaster ARD in 2013, V. Putin announced that after the implementation of the amendments to the legislation on NGO's in 2012, it was found that 654 Russian NGO's received foreign funding to the amount of 28 billion RUB (~ 0.8 billion USD), whereas Russia has only two similar “foreign agents” abroad – one in France, and the other in the US (President Rossii, 2013, April 3). On April 15, 2014 the “Foreign Policy Activities” State Program of the Russian Federation was approved (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, 2014, April 15). According to this document the funding of Russian foreign policy activities will gradually increase from around 65 billion RUB in 2013 up to 80 billion RUB in 2020, which is around 2 billion USD. In comparison, the US state operations and foreign assistance request for the 2015 fiscal year is around 50 billion USD (US Department of State, 2014, March 4). From these numbers it is obvious that Russia understands the importance of foreign funding in the achievement of its foreign policy goals, but in terms of its financial capacity and scale, is significantly behind the US

Political technologies

Sophisticated political campaigning methods know-how and tools are very important prerequisites in the struggle for power in contemporary media-influenced politics at the domestic and international level. The US is a global leader in terms of the development of political campaigning techniques, but Russia also has its own body of knowledge and approach to communicating politics. In order to get a better under-

standing of the contemporary situation, it is necessary to take a look back at the time around the collapse of the Soviet Union. The assistance of Western states in the promotion of democracy in the post-Soviet domain also manifested itself as targeted efforts to train young democrats on matters like the planning and implementation of political campaigns. Political consultants from the US and Western Europe made a contribution to ensure that political power in the countries of the post-Soviet bloc would be retained by those political forces that favored democratic values and that no reversal to communism could take place there.

Yet, as time progressed, a distinct school of political consulting emerged in the post-Soviet realm that was unique to the region and that was labelled “political technologies”. Within the Western bloc, the United States is considered the pioneer in political consulting, whereas Russia is the leading power in this respect in the post-Soviet space. Both schools of political consulting have many similarities, although there are certain differences resulting from different political contexts. The specific nature of Russian “political technologies” can be detected in the heavy use of administrative resources, state control of the media, low civic activity and legal nihilism. The demand for Russian political technologies is especially large in the post-Soviet countries, as these professionals have a more in-depth and acute understanding of the specific nature of the post-Soviet realm, compared to their Western counterparts.

Over time the schools of Western and Russian political consultancy clashed in their struggles for geopolitical influence in their countries of origin. A representative example of this was the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine, which were the beginning of the “Orange Revolution”. The “Our Ukraine” political coalition, which was oriented to the West, was supported by a political consulting group from the US, but the Kremlin's preferred candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, was promoted by the best Russian political technologists (Plasser, 2009: 30). Similar battles between political consultants have taken place in other countries and regions, where it has been important for world powers to influence election results in the necessary direction, to achieve their strategic and economic objectives.

Media

The Russian media system operates on a different basis than in Western countries (De Smaele 1999). The most important difference is that the media in the West is free, but in Russia it is not (Freedom House 2013). The most influential media – TV channels with the largest audiences are state owned (Khvostunova, 2013, December 6), thus they can be easily operated as propaganda instrument in the interests of the rul-

ing elite, which actually is the case. The circumstances of globalization of the information space allow Russia to target not only domestic audiences, but also people living outside the borders of Russia. In 2005, the *Russia Today* TV channel was launched, and it now broadcasts in English, Spanish and Arabic, has 22 offices in 19 countries, with a global reach of over 644 million people in more than 100 countries (*Russia Today*). In this way Russia has a channel for spreading its point of view on a global scale as well. Of course, Russia is using not only the traditional media, but also social media for the construction of its preferred reality. Some of the main propaganda tools used in social media are trolling and spreading disinformation, falsifications and fabrications (Gregory, 2014, May 11).

A brief overview of the main elements of the soft “counter-color revolution” methods gives evidence that Russia, in recent years, is deliberately developing and approving various ways for being a counterweight to the West at an informative level. The annexation of Crimea was a fast and successful application of the complex set of soft and hard tools for defending Russia’s interests in Ukraine.

Annexation of Crimea as a Russian “Counter-Color Revolution”

The ideology/interests model explained above (Picture 2) is a simple, but useful tool to structure and outline the logic of Russia’s actions in the context of the annexation of Crimea. Understanding the interests of Russia provides an answer to the question “why”, but the ideological dimension addresses the question of – “how”.

Russia’s Interests in Crimea and Ukraine

Primarily, Russia’s involvement in the Ukrainian crisis is motivated by military considerations. It has now officially announced that Russia could not allow NATO forces at Sevastopol, substantially limited access to the Black Sea and a change in the balance of forces in the Black Sea water area (Kremlin, 2014, June 1). The increasing Western influence in Ukraine would also mean a discontinuation of the military-technical cooperation between Russia and Ukraine, including such critical positions as the production of ballistic missiles, helicopter engines, hydraulic turbines for the Navy, that can lead to the actual termination of defense product deliveries from Ukraine (Satanovsky, 2014, June 11). The integration of Ukraine in NATO for Russia also poses a risk of a substantial weakening of its national missile defense system (Satanovsky, 2014, June 11).

At a political and economic level, Russia would like to see Ukraine as part of the Eurasian Union due to its territory, population, geographic location, common his-

tory and culture. Ukraine is also important for Russian gas transit – in losing Ukraine, Russia loses control over energy transit to Europe (Cheryomuhina, 2014, March 27). In fact, Ukraine is more important to Russia as a strategic area of interest, than the West. One can agree with Z. Brzezinsky that it is more difficult for Russia to maintain its Eurasian ambitions if a significant part of Slavic Europe integrate into the West (Brzezinsky, 1997: 46). Therefore, an intense increase in Western influence in Ukraine brings serious military, political and economic threats to Russia. Obviously, Russia had to react to protect its interests, but as a geopolitical struggle is covertly going on, Russia also had to provide an alternative to the West's narrative of promoting democracy, to justify its involvement in the Ukrainian crisis and the annexation of Crimea.

Ideology

The moral justification for Russia's annexation of Crimea is based on a combination of several lines of reasoning. Various aspects of Russia's narrative have been widely promoted in the Russian media and on the internet, but the main ideas were highlighted in a concentrated form in the March 18, 2014 speech of V. Putin about the status of the Crimean referendum (Kremlin, 2014, March 18). In comparison to the West's democracy promotion concept, Russia's ideology has a regional focus and it is rather fragmented in the sense that is not based on a single, powerful idea like communism vs. democracy, as it was during the Cold War. Nevertheless all the ideas form a coherent moral substantiation for Russia's activities (Table 2). The cornerstone of this narrative is the claim that Russia is an independent and active participant in international life and that its national interests must be considered and respected.

One of the main grounds is Crimea's common history with Russia – Crimea has been a part of the Russian empire, and it is also a symbol of Russian military glory. If the NATO fleet was present in Sevastopol naval port instead of the Russian, it would be not only a military loss, but also a severe humiliation at a symbolic level. Permission for the revision of Ukrainian territory is also found in history – according to V. Putin, today's boundaries of independent Ukraine were established during the formation of the Soviet Union, without taking into account its ethnic composition and history. In the specific case of Crimea, the legitimacy of the 1954 decision about the inclusion of the territory of Crimea in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic initiated by Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964, has been questioned.

Table 2
Russia's Ideological Grounds for the Annexation of Crimea

Functions of the Crimean annexation narrative	Corresponding themes in V. Putin's March 18 speech
Historical justification for the revision of borders	Crimea's historical ties with Russia, questioning the validity of the historical formation of the current Ukrainian borders
Definition of values	Orthodoxy as opposed to Western liberalism
	Multiculturalism and diversity in models of political and economic development
Moral justification of intervention	Protection of the rights of the Russian diaspora
Construction of the image of an enemy	Ukrainians as being nationalist, neo-Nazi, Russophobic and anti-Semitic
	The current Ukrainian government is illegitimate, because Euromaidan was a coup d'état sponsored by the West
	The double standards of the West, as opposed to Russia, being truly democratic and compliant with international law
	Opposition to American exceptionalism and global dominance

Orthodoxy, as a common ground for culture, values and civilizational bases for the nations of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, has also been mentioned. Orthodox religion is one of the cornerstones of the counterbalance to Western liberal democracy in terms of values and a world view. V. Putin underlines Russia's support for multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. This idea has a deeper background than just ethnic issues – by respecting different cultures, Russia demonstrates that it values diversity as opposed to the West which wants to impose one political and economic model for all nations. An important aspect in the Putin speech was also the recognition and condemnation of Soviet repressions against the Crimean Tatars, thereby drawing a dividing line between contemporary Russia and the Stalinist Soviet Union. To alleviate concerns that Russia could carry out repressions against the Crimean Tatars after the annexation of Crimea, V. Putin offered three official languages in Crimea – Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar.

Protection of the rights of the Russian diaspora abroad is one of the key pillars of Russia's contemporary foreign policy. The Russian diaspora is a result of the breakdown of the Soviet Union, when millions of Russians became minorities in the former

Soviet republics. As a result, the Russian people have, in the opinion of V. Putin, become one of the biggest divided nations in the world. According to the official position of Russia, those who remained outside the borders of Russia have been deprived of their historical memory, sometimes even their mother tongue, and they are being forcibly assimilated. One of the reasons why Crimea's reunification with Russia has been justified is the presence of a large Russian diaspora and the dominance of the Russian language as being native even for some of the Ukrainians in Crimea. By portraying the Ukrainians as being nationalist, neo-Nazi, Russophobic and anti-Semitic, Russia is constructing the image of enemy which is useful to justify its involvement. It is the evil from which Russia has to protect ethnic Russians in Ukraine. In the Russian version, an ethnically clean Ukraine, which is a goal of the current Ukrainian government, is a threat to the Russian diaspora, and Russia must therefore get involved.

According to the Russian view, the Euromaidan protests in Kiev were a "coup d'état" sponsored by the West and carried out through the means of terror, murder, and pogroms. Therefore, the current Ukrainian government is illegitimate. At the same time, V. Putin expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people, protesting against the corrupt and ineffective government and poverty, stating that Ukraine had serious internal problems and that people had right to fight for a fairer and better life. In this way, the Russian president highlighted that democracy was an important value for Russia, but not in the interpretation used by the West.

In the view of V. Putin, it is Russia that stands for truly democratic values and compliance with international law, but the West uses double standards and does not apply similar principles in every case. In justification, the presence of Russian armed forces in Crimea is being highlighted as being in accordance with international law. In the view of the Russian President, it was also necessary for Russia to provide the opportunity for a democratic referendum in Crimea with military support. V. Putin uses parallels in recent history to strengthen the morality of the annexation of Crimea in the eyes of the international community. His argument is that the Crimean people have the right to determine their future in a democratic way in the same way as Ukraine declared its independence after the breakdown of the Soviet Union and in the same way as Kosovo declared its independence, a fact which was welcomed by the West.

In general, V. Putin's point of view creates the opposition to American exceptionalism and global dominance after the breakdown of the bipolar system of the balance of power. The same idea was expressed in V. Putin's letter to the American people (Putin, 2013, September 11) during the Syrian chemical weapons crisis in 2013. The

main criticism of the US is based on the fact of military interventions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, and “color revolutions” which have brought chaos, violence and coups instead of democracy and freedom. In V. Putin’s opinion the same scenario was applied to Ukraine in 2004 and 2013. It should be emphasized that these ideas form the Russian “humanitarian public face” which is just one of the elements in a fierce and violent game for influence in the region.

Implementation

The analysis of the actual Crimean annexation has been made, based on the facts published in the major news media, and has been structured according to the timing of the events. The timeline is a convenient reference point, because the operation was very fast – it took about one month. A sequential record of the events makes it possible to trace the main methods utilized in this case. The analysis focuses on the activities undertaken by Russia and pro-Russian forces in Crimea, but it excludes the reaction to the events by Ukraine and the West, from its scope.

Preface: February 24 – 26, 2014

The Crimean crisis followed a few days after the Ukrainian parliament’s decision to oust President V. Yanukovich on February 22, 2014, and to name the pro-Western O. Turchyov as interim president on February 23, 2014. It exacerbated the relations between Russia and Ukraine, because Russia condemned the removal of V. Yanukovich for being illegal. The escalation of the situation in Crimea can be regarded as Russia’s immediate response to the victory of pro-Western forces in Kiev, because intense pro-Russia rallies were organized in Crimea as of February 24, 2014. The activists addressed Russia and urged it to defend them from “fascists”, thus creating a situation which perfectly suited Russia’s long-term compatriot policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia). One of the pillars of this policy is the protection of the rights of the Russian diaspora.

Pro-Russia rallies in Crimea served as the justification for Russia’s involvement, because it was a visible expression of the will of the people – the same as that of pro-Western protesters at Euromaidan in Kiev. In fact, the overall mood of the operation centered on the rhetorical and somewhat cynical question in regard to the governmental change in Ukraine – “If you can do this, why can’t we?”. The situation in Crimea, of course, was not just one-sided – the Crimean Tatars and other activists supporting the Euromaidan protesters in Kiev also arranged rallies in Crimea to express their political views. The violent clash between pro-Russian protesters and Eur-

omaidan supporters took place in Simferopol on February 26, 2014, thus marking the battle line between two conflicting world views.

By the end of February, the formation of self-defense forces in several cities of Crimea had already commenced, which was an important element in the course of the operation. “Self-defense” forces were crucial for Russia’s concealed use of military force, because they provided the arguments for Russia to deny its direct involvement. Due to the existence of these civil self-defense organizations, it was later possible to label these armed men, without insignia, as the “self-defense” forces of Crimean citizens. However, a military analysis of the Crimean operation reveals that “Russia’s elite mobile units – army intelligence personnel (GRU), paratroopers, and probably the Federal Security Service (FSB)” were involved (Bugriy, 2014, April 1). A few months later, V. Putin openly admitted that the self-defense forces in Crimea were backed up by the Russian military (*Russia Today*, 2014, April 17).

Intensification: February 27 – March 15, 2014

The planned annexation of Crimea by Russia began on February 27, 2014, and was a mixture of military, civic, political, diplomatic, and information activities. On this day, the parliament and the regional government buildings in Crimea were seized by unidentified armed men and the Russian flag was raised over both of them. A few hours after the seizure of the parliament building in the presence of armed men, the Crimean parliament elected the leader of the Russian Unity party, Sergiy Aksyonov, as the new Prime Minister of Crimea and called for a referendum on Crimea’s secession from Ukraine. The former Prime Minister, Anatoliy Mohyliov, considered that Crimea had to obey the Ukrainian parliament, and was therefore removed from his post.

The change of government in Crimea was complemented by pro-Russian demonstrators who stood outside the occupied building with Russian flags. The demonstrators shouted slogans in favor of reunion with Russia. These actions were performed as a deliberate mirroring of the events in Kiev – with protesters overthrowing the government by force. The concern over the massive violation of human rights in Ukraine, expressed by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia on February 27, 2014, supported the message of the pro-Russia demonstrators in Crimea. The increasing public concern about the violation of human rights also served as legitimation for the use of military force, according to V. Gerasimov’s concept of “color revolution warfare” as was explained previously.

The capture of other strategic objects in Crimea commenced with the seizure of the airports in the Crimean capital Simferopol and the Belbek International Airport in

the Black Sea port of Sevastopol on February 28, 2014, and then included military objects, the television station, communication centers and others. In the view of military analysts “the core Crimean force’s mission was specifically to capture military bases, disrupt Ukraine’s command and control channels and to put information pressure on the adversary” (Bugriy, 2014, April 1). Along with the “internal” activities in Crimea, on February 26, 2014, the President of Russia issued a decree, according to which the troops of the Western and Central military districts were alerted. Military drills with the purpose of testing the ability of troops took place from February 26 until March 3, 2014 (Ministry of Defense of Russia, 2014, February 28). As the military drills commenced, Russian armored vehicles and helicopters were seen in Crimea, adding tension to the Russian-Ukrainian relationship. In the Russian view, their military presence in Crimea was in accordance with existing agreements with Ukraine.

Incorporating Crimea into Russia was pushed forward at a political level too. On March 1, 2014, S. Aksyonov asked Russian President V. Putin to assist in ensuring stability and peace in Crimea. On the same day, the Federation Council of the Russian Parliament unanimously approved the deployment of troops in Ukraine in order to normalize and resolve the situation in the eastern regions of Ukraine (the decision was cancelled on June 25, 2014). Putin recognized S. Aksyonov as the legitimate leader of Crimea on March 4, 2014, stating that all legitimate procedures had been followed, despite the fact that it had taken place with the presence of armed men in the parliament building.

On March 6, 2014, the Crimean parliament asked Moscow if it could join Russia. This episode highlights the pseudo-democratic character of the political aspect of the operation, because the parliament made this decision before the referendum. The words of then Regional First Deputy PM Rustam Temirgaliev in his interview to the BBC, are significant: “We just want to pass our decision within the referendum” (BBC, 2014, March 6). In R. Termigaliev’s view, Crimea was already Russian on March 6, 2014, and consequently the Russian troops were in Russia, not Ukraine. It should also be mentioned that on the eve of the Crimean referendum, the United Nations Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution which urged countries not to recognize the results of the referendum. The draft was not adopted due to Russia voting against it and China abstaining (UN News Centre, 2014, March 15).

The drastic changes in the Crimean media landscape were also an important part of the Crimean operation. Exposing Crimean people to Russian media was one of the first steps taken after the beginning of the operation. For example, the seizure of

the strategic objects on February 28, 2014, also included the biggest local state owned TV station. The Institute of Mass Information registered 96 episodes of forceful Crimean media space exposure to Russia and violations of journalists' rights and freedoms from February 13 till March 25, 2014 (Institute of Mass Information, 2014, March 15). The BBC reported that the blackout of Ukrainian TV channels began on March 3, 2014 by disconnecting Ukrainian TV channels and replacing them with Russian TV stations. On March 9, 2014, Ukraine's largest cable operator told its subscribers that the removal of all Ukrainian TV channels was due to orders from the local authorities. The Crimean parliament took control of state-owned TV company "Crimea" on March 11, 2014. Web sites that were fully supportive of Crimea's union with Russia were launched before the referendum, and the printed press also took a pro-Russian position (BBC, 2014, March 13). Thus, before the referendum, the Crimean people were subjected to the intensive promotion of the "right choice", and the possibility of hearing other arguments was virtually eliminated.

Climax: March 16, 2014

On March 16, 2014, a referendum on the status of Crimea took place, in which, according to officials, over 95% of voters supported joining Russia, with a voter turnout of more than 80%. During the day of the referendum, a joyful mass celebration of the reunion with Russia took place on the streets of Simferopol. At the same time, the ethnic minority of Crimean Tatars who generally opposed joining Russia most probably boycotted the referendum. Despite this, the annexation of Crimea, according to the Russian version, was an expression of the democratic free will of the Crimean people. From the Russian point of view, the military presence was used merely to provide a peaceful and democratic referendum in the context of the threat to the Crimean people posed by the illegitimate Ukrainian government, backed by the West.

However, it should be emphasized that despite this comprehensive military presence, the Crimean annexation operation happened, on the whole, in a non-violent manner. In this way, the Russians ironically mimicked the Western style "color revolution" – strategic non-violence was achieved by the massive presence of armed men. But it should also be noted that, in spite of reasonable suspicions of electoral fraud during the referendum, a large section of the population indeed welcomed the union with Russia. It was the advantage that Russia masterfully used, to play the "color revolution" scenario against the West, in the battle for Ukraine's geopolitical orientation.

Ending: March 17 – 24, 2014

Following the referendum, Crimea's parliament declared independence from Ukraine and asked to join Russia on March 17, 2014. On the same day, V. Putin signed a decree recognizing Crimea as a sovereign state, which was a first step toward integrating Crimea as part of Russia. The following day, V. Putin addressed Russian parliament and formally informed them about Crimea's request to join the Russian Federation. The treaty with the new Crimean leadership, commencing the process of joining Crimea to Russia, was also signed on March 18, 2014. Later that day, V. Putin gave speech to the Russian public in a mass celebration of Crimea's annexation "We are together!" in Moscow. On March 21, 2014 V. Putin signed a law formalizing Russia's takeover of Crimea.

Already on March 19, 2014, Ukraine began to draw up plans for the withdrawal of Ukrainian soldiers and their families from Crimea to mainland Ukraine. On the same day, pro-Russian forces seized Ukrainian naval bases including the headquarters of Ukraine's navy. The seizure of Ukrainian bases in Crimea by Russian troops continued for several days, until March 24, 2014 when the Ukrainian forces withdrew from Crimea. Afterwards, Crimea's pro-Russian "self-defense" forces were integrated into the Russian Armed forces. Although the Ukrainian government did not recognize the legitimacy of the Crimean annexation by Russia, it actually had no choice but to yield to the overwhelming size of the Russian military, with the first diplomatic meeting between Russia and Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea taking place on March 24, 2014.

Conclusion

Mass uprisings are usually a combination of genuine local residents protesting against a ruling political elite and a certain degree of foreign involvement. Such a duality is the basis for the construction of the contradictory framing of the events in public discourse. There is ample evidence for the support of both ideas – the "fight for democracy" or "hidden tool of influence". Western involvement in post-Soviet "color-revolutions" has unfortunately turned out to be a double-edged sword. The support of the West is necessary for democratic initiatives in foreign countries, but at the same time it provides arguments for the defenders of authoritarian regimes. By formulating and promoting the frame of "color-revolutions" as a "hidden tool of the influence of the West", authoritarian leaders can legally and morally crush pro-democracy initiatives for being directed against the independence of a country.

In authoritarian Russia, in the political, military and academic domains, “color revolutions” have been acknowledged as one of the most important threats to its national interests. Of course, in this respect, one could debate whether it’s a threat to Russia as a country, or to a particular political regime in power? At the same time the turmoil following the “Arab Spring” in the Middle East and North Africa raises doubts about “color-revolutions” being the most effective tool for improving political systems. Russia finds grounds for conceptualizing “color revolutions” as an adaptive use of military force in the destabilization and continuing violence in this region. In defining “color-revolutions” as warfare, Russia openly opposes the West in its attempts for global dominance. Counter action against “color-revolutions” is one of the ways in which Russia is attempting to build a polycentric system of international relations. From the point of view of international order, Russia’s reaction to military intervention in Syria’s chemical weapon crisis in 2013 and the crisis in Ukraine in 2013/2014, was a rebellion that now forces a review of the rules of the game.

Russia’s position in the case of Syria was viewed with displeasure, but rather quietly in the West, because it was mostly limited to masterful argumentation. However, the annexation of Crimea came as a shock, because Russia adapted and used the methods that had previously been used by pro-Western forces. In order to counter the West, Russia has also added a military dimension to the concept of the “color-revolution”. In this way, it’s possible to resist strategic non-violence which is at the core of the Western understanding of “color-revolutions”. Paradoxically, but in the Crimean case, Russia was able to provide a non-violent situation through military superiority. Meanwhile, the struggle has turned into long-term violence in other regions in south-eastern Ukraine, because support there is not as great for Russia as it was in Crimea, and Ukraine does not want to give in to Russia’s pressure. Thus “color-revolutions” become violent if the party being attacked resists.

It is also very important to note the double-faced nature of Russia’s reaction to “color-revolutions”. Russia’s public messages may be appealing to those who are critical of the double standards of Western foreign policies, because its position, to a large extent, is based on anti-American sentiment. However, Russia’s position does not end there, because it criticizes the West for what it then implements itself. For example, the legitimacy of the change of government in Ukraine in February 2014 could, indeed, be disputed, but not less than – the change of government in Crimea before the referendum. In one case Russia appeals to legal arguments, in the other case it considers the vote of a parliament under the pressure of armed men to be legal. The same duality can be seen with regard to the work of organizations promoting transnational ideology.

Russia limits the domestic operations of foreign organizations considerably, but at the same time intensifies the operations of its own organizations abroad.

“Color-revolutions” as a geopolitical tool of influence are morally debatable, regardless of their violent or non-violent execution. If they are used and initiated by larger geopolitical players, then it is primarily done in their interests and at the expense of third parties. In non-violent cases, the populations of independent countries are being used as objects of manipulation, and the genuine process of civic participation and democratization gets discredited. In a case where there is an escalation in violence, third parties are being used as a battleground for the great powers, and local civilians are forced to endure the severity of a conflict that is basically not of their making.

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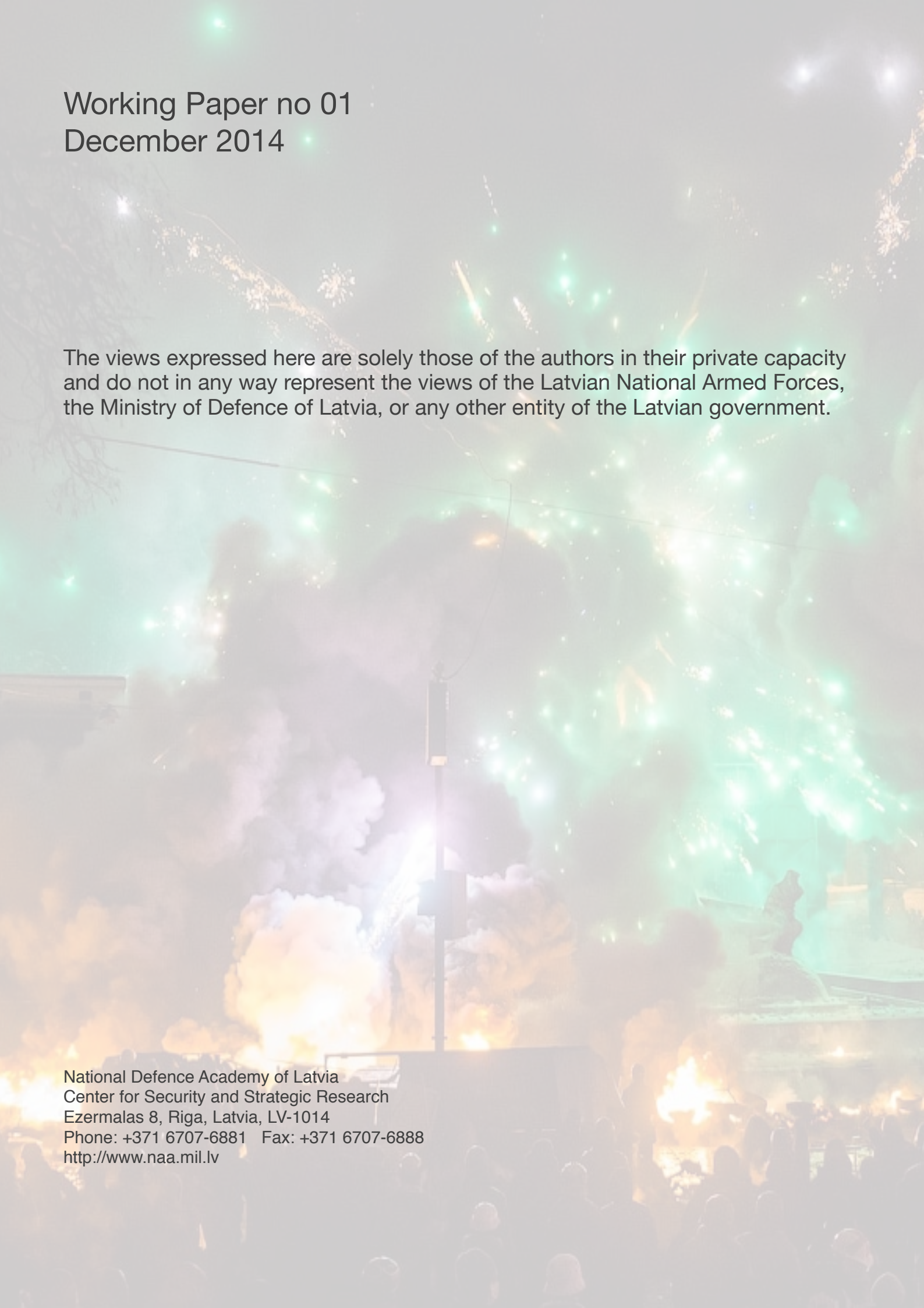
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