

# Military Thought

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## Political Engineering of Color Revolutions: Ways to Keep Them in Check

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**Abstract.** The authors explore the political undercurrents of color revolutions and come up with ways of keeping them in check.

**Keywords:** color revolution, massive street riots, public protests, scenarios of color revolutions, crowd control skills.

The geopolitical changes in the late 20th and early 21st centuries were, without a doubt, touched off by domestic convulsions of a varying scale in the countries affected. In the 1990s, revolutions exploded in succession in several countries that had been known previously for their socialist orientations. Similar developments in the Soviet Union accelerated its disintegration. Years on, a wave of “color and flower” revolutions rolled across the post-Soviet territories.

All these developments have changed the world’s geopolitical map out of all recognition over the past thirty years. Unloosed in different countries at different points in time, they have a lot in common – they started in formally well-off countries ruled by stable regimes either suddenly, triggered by a trifle pretext, or after a relatively brief “period of apprehension;” an immediate favorable response to the flare-up from leading Western countries with expressions of unreversed support for the revolutionary forces and calls, in several instances backed up by threats of use of military force, to the legitimate governments to cease violence; and almost identical scenarios under which mass protests were set off by petty events in a generally stable situation in a country, even one boasting relatively high living standards.

To all appearances, the masterminds of these overthrows are guided in this day and age by the elaborate managed chaos theory that has proved to be effective on the ground. This theory was most assiduously worked on in the early 1980s, at the multidisciplinary research center established at Santa Fe (Santa Fe Institute), New Mexico, in 1984 to specialize in blowing up managed chaos.

In 1992, the institute hosted a conference on the Chaos Theory and Strategic Thought, a subject clearly uncommon for it. The conferees thrashed out the ground rules of a new geopolitical concept of gaining and retaining superiority, basically by stirring up chaos within a hostile country in whichever way was the most effective.

Over the decades since the 1992 conference, the institute's geopolitical concept of winning superiority has been put through its theoretical and practical paces. Today, the theory of chaos rests on modern methodologies of booming mathematical disciplines, particularly, the theory of nonlinear dynamic systems, the catastrophe theory, theories of various random processes, and the mathematical theory of chaos proper.

These theories amount essentially to the formulation of a behavioral algorithm of large complex dynamic nonlinear systems having at least one unstable equilibrium point. The system, though, must be sensitive to minor changes in the initial conditions causing significant changes in the paths followed in system development. Smooth changes in the state of the social system under the effect of external and internal factors, even if attended by changes in its structure, lead to an evolutionary development of the system.

A point must be made, however, that the ideological reasons for color revolutions and the color revolution concept are a relatively recent development. The book titled *From Dictatorship to Democracy. A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* by Gene Sharp, an American professor of political science, published in 1993 has since been a key source of knowledge on color revolutions. In G. Sharp's eyes, the fight against governments that are not looking West is a fight against dictatorship. His book has become a true guidebook for contemporary "revolutionaries" and a repository of practical recommendations to opposition movements in Yugoslavia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere that engineered color revolutions at home.

"Color revolutions" is the name for a period of street riots and popular unrest sponsored by foreign nongovernmental organizations and commonly succeeding in the overthrow of the ruling political regime without foreign countries' military involvement.

The early years of the 21st century filed by under the shadow of color revolutions. In the last decade, another wave of color revolutions roared across the countries of the former U.S.S.R. The color revolutions that succeeded and those that failed in their attempts sought to split the countries on the post-Soviet territories from one another and to hem in Russia with neighbors far from friendly to it. This is certainly an indication that Russia is a target for forces that have a direct stake in isolating it. A new geopolitical structure must eventually emerge out of the global turmoil of the 21st century. The goals of this geopolitics were unambiguously framed by Halford Mackinder, a British expert in geopolitics and author of the Heartland Theory, in the early 20th century. His message was this: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands

the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island controls the World.” [This message was intended to convince the world of the crucial importance of Eastern Europe as the strategic route to the Heartland, which was Russia, and was interpreted as requiring a strip of buffer states to separate Germany and Russia, a country that was and still is the *grand prix* to go to the winner of the global tussle.]

H. Mackinder’s involved message is no revelation to experts in geopolitics who know well that Russia has been and is a world region that is self-sufficient in all natural resources. And more. Its rigorous climate has always placed extreme demands upon people to help one another and put in joint efforts to supply their needs. It is certainly the reason why Russia is the world’s center of productive forces. Productive process is going on always as people pool efforts to achieve a result benefiting everybody. All other countries and the world’s largest regions are forced by circumstances, in one way or another, to be sucked in the scramble for world resources to fulfill each their own interests.

The color revolutions that occurred in the first decade of the 21st century offer ample evidence that even though preparations for them and the algorithm they use in different countries have much in common they may differ significantly from country to country. A.E. Ganich and D.A. Lushnikov, both Russian experts in color revolution engineering, hold that there may be several scenarios followed by color revolutions in synthetic forms on the assumption that their combinations may offer a variety of heuristic opportunities.

- Under **Scenario One (classical Orange color revolution strategy)**, the ruling elite plans and carries out a surprise coup timed for upcoming elections and, in its trail, a stage-managed crisis of government legitimacy (members of the same elite run against the government’s candidates in the elections). In the case of Ukraine as an illustration, this scenario can be played out in society torn apart by competing clannish elites entering into short-lived coalitions. Apprehensive of a color revolution coming, the government has no choice but to maintain balance between them and spin a web of agreements and relationships between the elites. The web starts to come apart as the elections get underway, largely because of the absence of legitimate mechanisms of political power transfer, the formal legal “democratic” sheen regardless, on the post-Soviet territories (primarily in the countries on Russia’s southern fringes – Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan). The rift running across society affords an occasion to combine the scenarios of legitimacy crisis and crisis genesis.

The *genesis of legitimacy and charisma* produces an illusion, to be projected to divided society, of the public rallying around a political leader, allegedly independent from the powers that be and speaking for the interest of society as a whole. All color revolutions having boiled over in capital cities, the illusion cannot close the rift and cement all segments of the populace into a unified society (what had indeed happened in Ukraine), but it is just enough to snatch victory in the capital.

- Under **Scenario Two** (*an elite-led conspiracy*), a faction of the ruling elite conspires to overthrow its formal leaders and/or oust members of its another faction (or clan, clique or whatever) from their cushy jobs. An attempt was made to bring off this scenario in Azerbaijan by the Old Guard in the government inherited by Ilham Aliyev from his father, Heydar Aliyev. An obvious fail-proof chance, this sure-fire scenario was foiled by the young president's firm stand and staunch political will. The conspirators' vulnerability is the weakest point of this scenario. Any agreement reached within a close circle of conspirators will always be leaked to the public media networks, even as no more than hearsay, sneaked out to outsiders. As a scenario, "a plot among a few" is the worst chance to succeed. It was exactly that in Azerbaijan where the president booted out the bureaucrats conspiring against him ten days before of the election, the timing of his strike suggesting that he had long been aware of the conspiracy.

Centuries back, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote about "elite coups," conspiracies involving several persons, and about their strong and weak sides in this passage taken as an example here: "We know from history that an overwhelming majority of these conspiracies are woven by people of noble descent who are close to the Prince. No other people can plan to enter into conspiracy, and besides doing this would be extremely unwise, for those who are far from the Prince's court and have an insignificant status in society have neither an opportunity nor strength to carry out a conspiracy plan. More than anything else, people who are not vested with power cannot find reliable accomplices. They cannot promise people who are with them in conspiracy anything justifying this risk. If then they reveal their plan to two or three people, one of them certainly turns to be a traitor giving away and ruining them all."<sup>1</sup>

- **Scenario Three** (a sort of the "*March on Rome*," Benito Mussolini's style) is a revolution exported, if we may say so, from the fringes to the capital by the joint forces of metropolitan and regional elites leading a coalition of regional revolutionary forces to the capital.

This scenario was the closest thing to the original in Mikhail Saakashvili's march from Gori on Tbilisi. It was also unfolded in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Elements of this scenario were also in evidence in Serbia, with bands of revolutionary young people heading from outlying areas to the capital. This scenario was at its most striking in Ukraine where the Independence Square (*Maidan*) in Kiev had been overrun by bands of radical club-toting masked hoods from West Ukraine for three months, December 2013 to February 2014. The thugs had been trained for funds provided by the special services of Western countries (Germany, the U.S., and the United Kingdom). In the view of the experts in color revolutions, A.E. Ganich and D.A. Lushnikov, this experience can be embedded effectively into practically all scenarios.

- Under **Scenario Four (“*revolution in tow*”)**, some members of the elite exploit the outfall of riots overwhelming a country in direct or indirect protests against the head of state or government, or against some other factors (the events in Thailand and Greece in 2008 demonstrated that both natural and random factors count on a par). They install themselves at the head of the revolution that gives them an occasion to make, together with the rebels, demands for “democratization” and change of the regime that turn the raging conflict the way they want it to go. The probability of this scenario materializing depends a lot on the government’s response. This may be its resolve to spill blood and crush rioting by force (as in Uzbekistan, though a dubious example it is in the uncertainty about the qualification of the events as a color revolution) to hold back the conspirators from proceeding any further. When, however, the government shows signs of hesitation in reaching a settlement or suppressing the coup, or the ruling elite lacks consensus, the bet is that this scenario becomes a more likely choice than any other. In the judgment of A.E. Ganich and D.A. Lushnikov, color revolutions may follow other scenarios as well.

Some experts hold that color revolutions look more like a symbiotic type of coup and elite-led revolution that does not affect, though, the basic forms of economic organization and ownership patterns. Rather, they are attempts at a *coup d’etat* to replace the ruling regime in the guise of a political revolution. We subscribe to the view aired by A.A. Veshnyakov, former head of the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation: “The changes that have occurred in these countries [reference is made to the countries on post-Soviet territories, in the first place, those that border Russia – Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. – *Authors*] are not revolutions in the strict sense of the term – their objective and their end result did not bring about a change in the existing socioeconomic system; actually, the ruling elites (or some of their segments) were replaced with other competing groups driven by their own economic and political interests.”<sup>2</sup>

Color revolutions are a way apart from their classical aliases seeking to change the existing constitutional systems in their purported adherence to law and the constitution already in place. Members of the opposition are styling themselves as champions of existing democratic rights and freedoms trampled over by the current authoritarian regime, rather than as sociopolitical go-getters. The anti-Communist Velvet Revolutions in Central and East European countries, if looked upon from this angle, fitted more closely into the revolution mold in the traditional sense of the word. S. Markov, a renowned Russian political scientist, offered a concise definition, in our view one of the best ever given, of a color revolution, “as a new kind of political shenanigans to unseat politicians in power.” To our mind, it is a revolution of the 21st century, a revolution engineered by nongovernmental organizations, a revolution in the age of globalization. You can tell a color revolution from any other by what it does:

- **First.** The government is dislodged from power by peaceful strategies, and violence, too, when things get really tough. Law only counts after the events, not while they are at a high pitch, and whatever happens is held out to be within the framework of law. At the height of protests, the opposition thinks nothing about violating the law, yet it almost never uses physical violence or firearms.
- **Second.** Election is what the row is all about. The opposition touts its victory well before the election returns are in, and tags whatever they are as fraud.
- **Third.** Real action comes when mass demonstrations are staged in downtown and key government buildings are blocked off and seized.
- **Fourth.** A broad-based coalition of nongovernmental organizations, rather than any one single party, are the political mainspring.
- **Fifth.** Outside forces, too, are given a major role, specifically to:
  - provide funding to the masterminds of the revolution for years before it breaks out;
  - hijack and use without restraint the status of a supreme judge of what is legitimate and what is not – sticking a label of legitimacy on the opposition’s actions, even if they are against the law, and write off as illegitimate the measures the authorities take in defense; and
  - confront the government in office with an ultimatum at a crucial point by capitalizing on the ruling elite’s dependence on them (a majority of members of the ruling elite are prone to keep their money in banks and real estate in other countries).

Color revolutions are not followed up with profound political, social, or economic changes in countries where they succeed. A trend has emerged for young people to play a key role in the opposition in a color revolution. The protesting crowds driving color revolutions, though, come from different social and age backgrounds.

The radical changes that have happened over the last several decades have had a great impact on different youth groups, particularly on what they value most in life. The young people’s judgments, preferences, and behavioral patterns today will largely be at the core of society’s ideological, patriotic, and moral values through the 21st century.

Young adults start to build their own life at a very complex and fast-moving time – cardinal changes have occurred on their country’s political scene, democracy is striking root and sprouting, private ownership has made a comeback and is spreading far and wide, the labor market is growing, socioeconomic development is at odds with itself, social differentiation is intensifying, and mass communications and computerization are forging rapidly ahead. The young people’s

ideological and moral standards are impacted deeply by the “influence peddlers” from the U.S. and the European Union.

Sociological surveys conducted in Russia register significant shifts in the young people’s attitudes to ethical values such as the home country, patriotism, fidelity to national heroic traditions, memory of those who gave their lives for the nation, duty, dignity, readiness to self-sacrifice, and respect for national history. Accents have slipped gravely in social and moral orientations. Young people are today more worldly wise, egocentric, and even antihuman. To put it in practical terms, many of them are sloppy in performing their primary civil responsibilities, are socially immature and immoral, intolerant and aggressive, which all translates rapidly into growing criminality among youngsters, other vices apart.

Immorality sweeping over the country has an adverse effect of discipline in the ranks of uniformed services to an extent that it makes society hard to protect, the country’s borders to defend, and peaceful life to maintain as it has been lived until recently in many of its regions. The country’s Armed Forces have been hit the hardest by the glaring shortage of young draftees. The Army and Navy are virtually incapable of meeting their daily needs for new conscripts in strength and quality. Their dramatic situation was underscored during several previous enlistment campaigns that required enormous physical and legal efforts to complete.

Russia is not alone struggling with its youth problems. So also are its allies in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that are going through a controversial and complex period in their social development. Young people in the other CSTO member countries have their priorities in social and moral orientation greatly misplaced, and their attitudes toward their nations’ ethical values and history have veered sharply off course.

Developments in Russia and other CSTO member countries in recent years **have largely been responsible for the decline in the enlightening effect of culture, arts, sport, and education on the younger generation** as key factors for fostering patriotic, cultural, social, and moral values in young people.

We can now identify several factors causing, each in its own way, a reversal of value orientations among young people. They are primarily ethical, socioeconomic, political, religious, and psychological.

**Ethical factors** include the crisis of state ideology; loss of criteria against which events unfolding before our eyes can adequately be assessed; development of new forms and ways (media technologies and mass communications) of influencing personal, group, and mass mindsets of members of the younger generation; expansion of virtual conscience among the young; undervaluation of national, cultural, and historical traditions; and the decreasing effect of the state’s major sociocultural institutions – science, education, upbringing, and culture.

The **group of socioeconomic factors** includes inflation and plunging living standards of the young; property polarization among young people; worsening



mental and physical health of the young; criminalization of relations in society; and ethnic tensions.

**Political factors** lead to a rise of information society; changes in the geopolitical situation; appearance of new geopolitical interests; promotion of democracy and information openness; and a low political, legal, and information culture among the young.

**Religious and psychological factors** combine general social psychological factors (mass stereotypes, local traditions, moods, and views).

We have found in a survey we did that the attitude toward timeless cultural, moral, patriotic, and esthetic values in society has taken a turn for the worse, toward pragmatism in its prominent egotistic, antisocial, and antihuman manifestations. Gain-and-consume self-centered and even asocial marginal pragmatism are the values, nay, antivalues, that are put ahead of anything else.

Society in Russia and the social framework in its allied countries seem to have abandoned supreme values and ideals. Instead, society is now an environment of unrestrained egotism and morality in chaos. Culture and morals in crisis throw the state's efforts in politics, economics, and social services into disarray.

To achieve their geopolitical aims, our ill-wishers have set themselves a goal of reducing the role of the CSTO member states in the world community of nations. They encourage separatism in multiethnic countries, foist on them moral and ethical values alien to their traditional mentality, and stoke ethnic and religious strife. Many countries have come face to face with a real threat to their national self-identity, and their cultural and information environment has been deformed.

Distortion of orientations in life is frequently exploited by extremists and opposition forces of all shades to achieve their destructive objectives by stage-managing crowds of young people devoid of any sense of idealism, morality, or patriotism in color revolutions against the government in office.

This mix of contributing factors obscures the difference between good and evil and impedes recognition of truth, dignity, honor, and conscience. It also distorts and supplants the traditional conceptions of humans and the purpose of life. Contemporary culture warps the traditional understanding of "morality" as politeness, acceptance of the absolute laws of truth, and human dignity, duty, honor, and conscience.

Young people's moral profile is shaped up by learning socially significant values and adopting them as elements of their conceptions and behavior.

The younger generation must be brought up on the basis of traditions, patriotism, and respect for other nations, universal human morals, and the brightest paragons of national and world culture.

Russia and other CSTO countries must aim their efforts at creating optimal sociocultural and educational conditions to raise harmoniously developed individuals, intelligent and seeking self-improvement and self-realization, responsible and conscious of their civil status.

The first step has, we believe, been made toward moral revitalization of the nation in the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation until 2025 approved by the country's President in a decree he signed in 2012.

The educational systems in Russia and other CSTO member countries where young people are oriented in the right direction so far give less attention to this problem than they have to. Learning primarily serves to equip students with knowledge, skills, and habits (cultivation of intelligence), and is, therefore, deficient, in a way, with upbringing taking a back seat. The potential of background development fostering patriotism, morality, esthetic ideals, and culture of human to human relationships and communication with other nations through education has not been actually tapped at all.

In the current situation, it is reasonable, in our view, to **draw on the stock of social values in CSTO member countries and mobilize their home base to forestall color revolutions** by:

- developing a cementing idea for the CSTO, giving consideration to the member countries' common national interests because ideology is spread across all segments of society in each CSTO country. This idea (or ideology) will underlie a thorough renovation of all aspects of society on the basis of moral values. Society will switch its orientations to harmonious development of cultural, patriotic, and physical wealth;
- formulating a strategy for patriotic, moral, and cultural upbringing of the younger generation in CSTO member countries. This approach will, in the first place, contribute to ethical and cultural resurgence, enhancement of the CSTO member countries' defensibility, and to attainment of social and economic stability in these countries. Their citizens' high ethical standards, civil attitudes, and patriotic feelings will, in a large measure, help the future of the Collective Security Treaty Organization happen.

Appropriately, Russian President Vladimir Putin said meeting public spokespeople on young people's ethical standards and key aspects of ethical and patriotic upbringing: "No one here is responsible for this aspect of education in a systemic way. This is no simple matter, I'm at one with you, and if it is done in a formalistic way it will kill the end goal on the root, almost from the start, as this happened regrettably to the former Soviet Union."

Patriotism can only be fostered by the joint efforts of government agencies and nongovernmental organizations. These efforts must be focused on what welds people of various ethnic origins, religions, and political affiliations together, and on their common desire to make their country strong. Ethical education of the younger generation will only then produce the desired results.

Ideological, patriotic, and moral development and education of young people (fledgling citizens) are key factors for the development of CSTO member countries, achievement of internal cohesion of each nation, its moral values, and its political and economic stability that hold it together. Society's maturation and

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development patterns, as also the unity of the Organization, depend directly on people's civil attitudes, their motivations and will, their priorities in life, their ethics, morality, and inner values.

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NOTES:

1. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Gosudar' . Razmyshleniya nad pervoy dekadoy Tita Liviya* [The Prince. Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius], Harvest Publishers, Minsk, 2004, pp. 511-512.

2. URL: <http://www.interfax.ru> (Retrieved on April 16, 2013).

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