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**ENGINEERED REVOLUTIONS IN KYRGYZSTAN: "SOFT  
POWER" OR "HARD POWER"**

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**Abstract**

In 2005 and 2010, events called "color revolutions" took place in the Kyrgyz Republic. Despite the positive changes that have taken place in the political system over the past ten years, the situation remains unpredictable and quite difficult. This is due, inter alia, to the preservation in the country of informal relations and institutions of influence, which enter into confrontation with state bodies and structures. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the Kyrgyz North and South are noticeably different in socio-economic infrastructure. Since the Soviet Union in the North of Kyrgyzstan, the processes of industrialization and urbanization have been more intense, while the South has remained more of an agrarian subregion. In this article, the technicality of this process is considered. The "color revolution" as a political technology for organizing mass protests is investigated in comparison with the applicability of force. The thesis is justified that the line between peaceful protests ("soft power") and an armed coup ("hard power") is rather conditional. It is concluded that many of the applied technologies of "color revolutions," despite even vivid symbolism, become honed methods or step-by-step guidelines for changing the ruling elites and are less and less reminiscent of the classical revolutionary process. The significance of the study lies in the modern political-scientific conceptualization of the phenomenon of "color revolution" based on the convergence of the theories of "soft power" and "hard power" necessary to understand the current international processes and problems of the sustainable development of political regimes.

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## 1. Introduction

The term "color revolution" was introduced into scientific circulation relatively recently at the beginning of the 21st century. Many experts believe that this technology is most effective and applicable to countries in which the leadership has weak political will, and the opposition has a high level of support among the population, especially young people. By "color revolutions" people mean both the political technology of organizing mass protests, and the very fact of a change of power using the so-called "soft power." Moreover, the line between peaceful protests and an armed coup is rather conditional, since non-violent methods can be transformed into direct actions of state disobedience ("hard power"). If we consider the cases of the post-Soviet states, then in them, indeed, there are similar scenarios for the removal of the current government. The impetus for action is the elections held in the state. It should be noted that many of the applied technologies of "color revolutions," despite even vivid symbolism, become honed methods or step-by-step guidelines for changing the ruling elites and are less and less reminiscent of the classical revolutionary process. But this, unfortunately, does not reduce the severity of the problem. "Color revolutions," being a high-tech product of hybrid and network warfare, open new questions for the scientific and expert community regarding ensuring political stability and security of states in the new information age.

## 2. Problem Statement

If we consider the cases of the post-Soviet states, then in them there are similar scenarios for the removal of the current government. The impetus for action is the elections held in the state. After the announcement of the results, the losing participants announce multiple violations during the election process and falsification by the current government of the voting results. Mass demonstrations and rallies are organized demanding fair elections. Opposition leaders are most often former state officials who were removed from power at one time. Subsequently, with the advent of the new leadership, the foreign policy course changes in favor of cooperation with the state that financed the opposition forces.

Barsamov (2006) identifies the conditions for socio-political development in which the use of technologies of "color revolutions" can be successful: delegitimization of power, socio-political crisis; pressure from other States through economic leverage and soft power channels; the dissemination of utopian ideas among the population about a "better life" on the example of neighboring countries; growing contradictions and divisions within the political establishment; cohesion of opposition forces; mass activity; the inability of the authorities to use force.

Regarding the implementation of foreign influence technologies, two levels can be distinguished here. At the first level, pro-Western politicians and officials are engaged in the promotion of interests. At the second level, there are non-governmental organizations, both international and national, implementing projects and programmes of the State sponsoring them. These aspects require modern political analysis, including through the study of revolutionary transformations in specific countries (for example, in the Kyrgyz Republic). At the moment, at least two main directions have developed in the scientific world towards understanding the "color revolutions".

In the first direction, the following features of this phenomenon are distinguished: democratism, non-violent character, electoral revolution (Huntington, 1993; McFaul, 2002).

At the same time, the consequences of the protests of the 21st century (for example, events in Libya, Syria, Venezuela) go beyond the framework of a non-violent change of power. Civil wars, humanitarian disasters and other realities of protest activity marked a new stage in the functioning of the "color revolutions." Therefore, even from a scientific point of view, it becomes difficult to call them technologies of non-violent resistance in its pure form.

The second scientific direction, which is popular in Russia and other CIS countries, refers to the features of the "color revolution": the external factor (external influence), "soft power" / "hard power" and the dismantling of the political regime (political system) (Nye, 1990, 2004).

According to political scientist Fedorovsky (2015), this technology is associated with the concept of "soft power. As researcher Terterov (2016) notes, "color revolutions" are a form of foreign policy activity of states using tools of "soft power".

The revolutions constructed by external forces differ from the classical ones in the absence of an ideological component, the point application of manipulative practices and non-mass initiation (truncated social base).

Initially, a special bet in such revolutions is made on young people and students. Many other social groups with richer life experience are not considered as the main force of the "color revolutions" and its social base. This is described in more detail in the article "'Color revolutions' as an anti-freedom virus" by historian Matveeva (2019).

In addition, the success of the "color revolution" largely depends on the used combination of external and internal factors, on which special operations designed for short-term and intensive impact are imposed.

In essence, the "color revolution" is a combination with a zero amount, where the victorious side receives exactly as much as the loser loses. At the same time, the functional specifics of this technology in the unpredictability and destructive nature of the result. As a result, a real threat to social and political stability is created, public confidence in state institutions, including new ones, is undermined, and the crisis situation is not overcome, but only aggravated. Most often, "color revolutions" culminate in a change of ruling elites.

Considering modern cases of "color revolutions" in the expanses of Eurasia in the 21st century, it becomes obvious that all of them are somehow aimed at separating the institutions of civil society and the state through the promotion of relevant antagonistic ideas in the information field. The way out of the situation is seen by protesters in the complete dismantling of the current political regime using manipulative technologies and alternative variations are ignored.

It is also worth distinguishing between the schemes of "color revolutions": classical (theoretical about which D. Sharp speaks in the work "From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Strategy and Tactics of Liberation") and actual (used in modern world conditions).

The classic scheme involves the peaceful struggle of the opposition against an authoritarian regime and excludes the intervention of foreign states and interests. In this context, opposition forces are seen as a democratic part of society aimed at changing the situation in the country. The prerequisites for such a

scheme are natural socio-political and economic processes that motivate civil society to peacefully disobey. As a result, a psychological effect arises and law enforcement agencies go over to the side of the protesters. A new election date is set in the state and a new political elite is formed. About such scenarios of a change of power says D. Sharp.

The actual scheme looks different. The reason for the "color revolution" is not the current socio-political and economic problems, but the interest of foreign states that design and provoke an artificial conflict. The opposition realizes the interests of various political players, including from foreign countries. Peaceful protests lead to mass clashes with police and other law enforcement agencies, public order is being violated. The coming to power of the new political elite does not stabilize the situation in the state, but only exacerbates, military clashes (civil war) continue, the political crisis intensifies, a humanitarian catastrophe ensues. The peculiarity of this scheme in foreign influence on protests: some states support the opposition (the actual initiators of the "color revolution," not a friendly country), others formally or informally advocate the ruling regime (interested in political stabilization and maintaining the former political establishment in power, a friendly country).

The classical model of the "color revolution" is more a theoretical construct, which is also disconnected from the world political realities for several reasons.

Firstly, the opposition in some cases commits a "color revolution" in a country that is de jure democratic (for example, Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan).

Secondly, not only peaceful protesters, but also foreign mercenaries (cyber detachments, private military companies, supranational leaders of public opinion) rarely take part on the side of the opposition.

Thirdly, "color revolutions" have ceased to be peaceful and lead to mass clashes with loss of human life.

Fourth, actions take on a radical character and lead to protracted and more painful forms of confrontation – civil wars.

Fifth, "color revolutions" in cases of victory lead to serious ideological persecution, repression and political attacks against citizens who did not support the protesters. Those who advocated for the current government are automatically discredited.

The object of the influence of "color revolutions," as a rule, are:

- the political regime of the state (ruling elites), conventionally called the "adversary,"
- political regimes of countries (ruling elites) under the influence of the "opposing state,"
- political regimes of countries (ruling elites), geographically located near the "enemy state" or its allies ("regional arc of instability").

In a generalized form, there are several interpretations of the "color revolution":

- forced and intensive democratization of the political system through a coup d'état introduced from outside,
- stimulation of protests and coup d'état in the context of the artificial design of political destabilization,
- a modified analogue of the "velvet revolution" of the late 1980s with the participation of student groups and youth,
- blackmail technology of the current government,

- the adoption of the introduction of a network war against the current political regime.

If we consider the "color revolution" as a transformational process, then it should be divided into several stages: initiation, confrontation and transformation.

Tokmakov (2020) in one of his works concludes that the product of the "color revolution" is a change of political elites, and therefore, it has more in common with a coup d'etat than with a classical revolution.

The form of implementation of "color revolutions" is a political ultimatum (blackmail).

The tool for implementing "color revolutions" is a youth protest force.

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of this study is the "color revolutions" in the Kyrgyz Republic, transforming from peaceful actions described in the theory of "soft power" into a forceful confrontation with the state ("hard power").

#### **3.1. Study of the Tulip Revolution (2005)**

For the first time, the political forces of Western countries publicly declared negative attitude towards the President of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Akaev back in 2004, when the document "Political Transition in Kyrgyzstan: Problems and Prospects" was submitted for public review by the international organization ICG. It expressed the need to support non-governmental organizations, the media and other civil society institutions in the fight against the current government. A more substantive message was voiced by US Ambassador S. Young, who proposed a mechanism to combat the current political regime in Kyrgyzstan and named the reasons for these decisions.

"The main thing in the election period is to incite disrespect for the political corrupt regime of Askar Akayev, his pro-Russian orientation..." – S. Young stressed (as cited in National Security Strategy of The United States, 2005).

Even before the active phase of the tulip revolution, mass opposition protest rallies were held in Kyrgyzstan. Opposition leaders advocated extending parliament for a year to call early presidential elections.

Elections of deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic were held in two rounds. The opposition agenda was transformed depending on political events. Discontent caused the removal from registration of candidates from some opposition parties. The situation worsened markedly after the announcement of the results of the first round, when it became clear that the opposition would receive less than 10% of the seats in the new composition of the Kyrgyz parliament. The leader of the opposition, who headed the Coordinating Council of National Unity, former Prime Minister K. Bakiev lost the elections in the Jalal-Abad region. And on March 5, a wave of mass protests took place in the south of the republic in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad. The demands of the protesters were not limited to canceling the election results, but also related to the resignation of the country's president Askar Akaev. The main subjects of protest activity were the opposition parties Ata-Jourt (did not allow the elections) and the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (lost in the elections).

As a result, by March 21, protesters took control of the Jalal-Abad, Talas, Osh regions, on March 24, clashes between opponents and supporters of the president of the republic began in Bishkek, which led to the storming of the Government House and on April 4, Askar Akaev resigned as president of the republic.

The revolutionary process in Kyrgyzstan has not been completed. Already in April 2007, new protests organized by the opposition took place in Bishkek. Participants in the mass rally demanded the resignation of President Kurmanbek Bakiev and constitutional reform. On April 19, protesters attempted to storm the Government House. However, law enforcement officers did not allow this. The 2007 conflict is attributed by many experts to constitutional changes and the struggle for the power of individual political forces.

### **3.2. Study of the "Melon Revolution" (2010)**

Internal problems in Kyrgyzstan have not been resolved. The clan struggle for power and its removal from the problems of Kyrgyz remained, prices for utilities and goods increased.

Riots began on April 6, 2010 in Talas, where the opposition seized the regional administration building. In response, law enforcement agencies used force methods.

On April 7, 2010, protests against the current government began in Bishkek, which resulted in clashes between protesters and law enforcement officials. During the struggle, firearms were used, 87 people died, more than five hundred were injured of varying severity. The death of the protesters aggravated the situation and led to an escalation of the conflict. By April 8, the opposition controlled six of the seven regions of the republic (Talas, Naryn, Issyk-Kul, Chui, Osh and Batken), captured the Government House, Parliament, and the Prosecutor General.

April 15, K. Bakiev resigned and left the country. An interim government came to power, led by the leader of the social democratic party, former Foreign Minister of the Republic R. Otunbaeva. At the end of June 2010, a referendum was held, at which a new constitution was adopted and most of the voters supported the interim government under the leadership of R. Otunbaeva. In July, she became interim president, she was replaced by A. Atambayev, who won the election.

The mass protests that led to the two revolutions clearly demonstrated the root causes of conflicts in Kyrgyzstan: the preservation of the clan-tribal factor in the political management of the state, the unresolved economic problems of the population of the republic, the complexity of staffing of the authorities and their competence.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to present the political and scientific conceptualization of the phenomenon of "color revolution" as exemplified by the events in the Kyrgyz Republic, which is necessary for understanding the current international processes and problems of sustainable development of political regimes.

## 5. Research Methods

The study uses various methods and approaches (institutional, comparativistic, structural-functional, comparative-political) used in political science and the theory of international relations.

The institutional method reveals the role of political institutions (opposition, civil society) in revolution activities. The comparativistic method fundamentally affects the perception of the integrity of the subject of the study, since it allows us to analyze the individual revolutions being constructed in the Kyrgyz Republic ("Tulip Revolution," "Melon Revolution"). The structural-functional method is based on the isolation in the theory of forces ("soft power," "hard power") of structural components ("color revolution") and their role relative to each other. The comparative political method allows comparing the "color revolutions" in Kyrgyzstan with other similar processes in Central Asia, the CIS and the world as a whole. The scientific and practical significance of the study lies in the modern political and scientific conceptualization of the phenomenon of "color revolution" based on the convergence of the theories of "soft power" and "hard power" necessary to understand the current international processes and problems of the sustainable development of political regimes.

## 6. Findings

We highlight several systemic problems that have become catalysts for the revolutionary moods of the opposition and other foreign interests in the Kyrgyz Republic. First, the lack of a consolidated elite and ineffective decisions of political institutions in crisis situations. Secondly, the preservation of the territorial and clan separation of the elite. This is not just domestic political competition, but rather a real struggle with all the ensuing consequences. Thirdly, the presence of economic and political uncertainty and the absence of a political culture of compromise among elites. Fourth, the acute socio-economic problems of the population of the republic. Labour migration and unemployment. Differentiation of the republic into a more industrial north and an agrarian south.

In addition, the motivators of the economic plan (economic uncertainty and socio-economic problems of the population) depend on political, and, conversely, i.e., there is a certain relationship between them. Let's reveal this aspect. The aggravation of political relations and, as a result, the change of power every five to six years does not always directly affect the untouchability of the institution's ownership in a constitutional way.

Every new political cycle, produced by the revolutionary method, is constantly revising property rights and intensifying the struggle of elites for economic resources. Thus, political disorders lead to a new redistribution of capital and profitable enterprises using power. Of course, this course of events will not suit everyone and with a new political crisis, all these problems will again result in mass disorders and unrest (a new "cycle of revolutions" will begin).

A unique feature of the republic is its agrarian character. This is determined by natural and climatic conditions and affects the earnings of the population. The weak development of modern agricultural production provokes massive lack of money and scares away potential investors.

Linear mechanisms in building Kyrgyzstan's economic policy make the republic dependent on external financial support. The complexity of the situation is that the financial resources of international

credit organizations, which are provided under state guarantees, noticeably prevail in the economy. The next political crises significantly reduce direct investment and negatively affect the economic image of Kyrgyzstan.

The emergence of protest sentiments in the Kyrgyz Republic, as in general and throughout the world, is also intensified by the difficult epidemiological situation. Mechanisms to combat the coronavirus pandemic, expressed in restrictive measures, provoked a compression of the republic's economy (transfers of labor migrants have noticeably decreased, enterprises and companies have closed, the purchasing power of residents has sharply decreased, etc.) and the social isolation of society from power (social distance, online communication, distance learning).

The pandemic is a serious domestic test against the backdrop of global economic cataclysms and crises. Therefore, the main reasons for initiating the designed protests in 2021–2025 may be the bankruptcy of enterprises, delays in payments, wages, a decrease in real incomes of the population, unemployment and poverty.

## 7. Conclusion

Cases of "color revolutions" in Kyrgyzstan demonstrate that for prevention of radicalization of protests, first of all, it is necessary to form effective communications and platforms for interaction with public activists. It is important to involve activists in dialogue for a joint solution. Therefore, value can be of a horizontal format of interaction where there is an exchange of the most various public opinions. In some cases, we will apply this format to joint decision-making instead of strengthening of measures of prohibitive value.

We see how technologies of "color revolutions" with every new time become more sophisticated and difficult, gain intensive and hi-tech character. The information and psychological front initiated by a revolution amplifies; there is a substitution of concepts and rejuvenation of participants of protest actions. Through social networks the activists find the audience, use clear terminology and images for the description of a problem in the necessary context. Promotion traditional and internet mass-media is applied to strengthening of effect.

The technology of "color revolutions" is one of threats of stability and safety of the state. Risks of "color revolutions" are long-termed: retraction in mass actions of bigger number of supporters, formation of leaders of public opinion and opposition, expansion of geography and centers of conflictness. Preparation of such events can take from several months to several years. The scenario rolled not once imposed by foreign interested parties distinguishes such technologies from spontaneous actions which arose on a specific social and economic or political problem.

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