
Template Revolutions: Marketing U.S. Regime Change in Eastern Europe

Gerald Sussman and Sascha Krader

Portland State University

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Abstract

Between 2000 and 2005, Russia-allied governments in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and (not discussed in this paper) Kyrgyzstan were overthrown through bloodless upheavals. Though Western media generally portrayed these coups as spontaneous, indigenous and popular ('people power') uprisings, the 'color revolutions' were in fact outcomes of extensive planning and energy — much of which originated in the West. The United States, in particular, and its allies brought to bear upon post-communist states an impressive assortment of advisory pressures and financing mechanisms, as well as campaign technologies and techniques, in the service of 'democracy assistance'. Their arsenals included exit and opinion polling, focus groups for 'revolutionary messaging', and methods and training in 'strategic nonviolent conflict'. Among the key foreign agents involved in the process of creating 'transitional democracies', as discussed in this study, are the United States Agency for International Development, the National Endowment for Democracy and its funded institutes, George Soros's Open Society Institute, Freedom House, and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. These developments are conceived as aspects of the larger neoliberal program of opening the Eastern European region for commercial, strategic military, cultural, and political domination by the G-7 countries. Four types of foreign assistance studied are: (1) political; (2) financial; (3) technical training; and (4) marketing (propaganda).

Introduction

The dissolution of Soviet power throughout the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Central Asia excited a new kind of Western intervention, a 'soft imperialism' described in official lexicon as 'democracy promotion'. In the late 1990s and into the next decade, Western mass media routinely represented the serial political upheavals that took place in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and Central Asia as legitimate struggles of 'people power' democracy over tyranny. The Western allies, particularly the United States, actively encouraged political mobilisations in the region that sequentially deposed Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia, and invalidated the election of Viktor

Yanukovych in Ukraine. Foreign electoral intervention was a means of politically engineering their replacement by pro-Western politicians who, in the name of democracy, presumably would carry out 'reforms' in concert with state and commercial interests of the United States, the European Union, the WTO, and NATO.

By the time of the Milošević overthrow initiative in 2000, the State Department already had in place a 'revolution template',¹ or what Beissinger (2006) calls a democracy 'module'. The template began taking shape in the 1980s in Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria and became for the whole Eurasian region a non-militarist and cost-effective option for vanquishing left-wing and nationalist heads of state.² So-called democracy assistance consisted of a fluid package of funding and other support mechanisms designed essentially around marketing principles to effect rapid regime change and political and economic 'shock therapy' in selected countries whose governments the State Department regarded as impediments to a global market-based political order. These efforts relied heavily on techniques and technologies of modern propaganda, largely drawn from U.S. political practice. (See Sussman 2005.)

The principal institutional actors in U.S.'democracy promotion' consist of the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the National Endowment for Democracy. NED was created in 1983 as a nominally private, Congressionally funded organization that would assume some of the regime change functions, but with more flexible and transparent means, as those used by the then discredited CIA. One of NED's founders told the *Washington Post* that 'A lot of what we [NED] do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA'. Relative openness was seen as a better formulation for pursuing U.S. national interests (Ignatius 1991). Democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe, starting with Poland and East Germany, became one of central tropes in a renewed U.S. effort by the Reagan administration to roll back the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact alliance.

This paper looks at the intervention of the Western powers, particularly the United States, in the 'colour revolutions' (a brand name drawn from oppositionist party emblems) of Eastern Europe (Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine in their chronological order).³ We discuss how a set of pretested, modular techniques and technologies have been employed as part of a template for fostering regime change. Although the government and media of the United States loosely used the terms 'dictatorship' and 'revolution' to describe conditions in these countries, neither was a fair depiction. More accurately, they were and remain semi-authoritarian. And, as some have argued, even if the more militant groups intended more radical outcomes, they ended up being 'failed revolutions' (Beissinger 2006).

An early initiative of the U.S. Congress's democracy assistance program, in anticipation of a post-communist Eastern Europe, was the 1989 legislation of a SEED (Support for East European Democracy) Act (22 U.S.C. 5421). This act, initially appropriating \$938 million for Poland and Hungary, included funds, according to President Bush's signing statement, for 'economic stabilization, trade liberalization, Enterprise Funds to nurture private sector development, labor market reform, and enhanced environmental protection'. USAID described the 'enterprise funds' under this act as a 'public-private partnership [that] would facilitate well-functioning markets through a combination of investment and development activities' (USAID 2000). Democracy was clearly conceived within the fundamentals of market ideology.

One of NED's first interventions within the Soviet orbit was in support of Poland's anti-communist Solidarity movement. In Poland, as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, NED was joined in the task of effecting regime change by its constituent party institutes, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), together with the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for International Private Enterprise, USAID, the private, government-supported Freedom House, George Soros's Open Society institutes, and other public and private institutions. (See Sussman 2006.) High profile emigrés from the CEE region, including Soros, and former secretaries of state Madeline Albright (board chair of NDI) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (NDI director) were prominent among the American regime change agents. All of them shared a visceral hostility toward communism.

Since 1992, Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and to a lesser degree southern Africa, have been declared the main targets of IRI and NDI. USAID acknowledges that its own willingness to fund this region has to do with 'the significance of these regions to the United States' (USAID 1999, 16, 17). It is not, therefore, simply internal democratic struggles in the world that draw the attention of the United States but rather, axiomatic to political realism, their relative importance in terms of long-term strategic objectives. The instability in Yugoslavia that led to its breakup starting in the early 1990s and continuing national, ethnic, and local political conflicts since then provided opportunities for a series of interventions by public and private foreign agencies engaged in the 'democracy promotion' project.

For 'well-functioning markets' to occur in Eastern Europe, a neoliberal governance structure would be a prerequisite, as would Western style electioneering that would facilitate its assumption of power. The challenge for the United States was discovering reliable 'leadership' that was prepared to abandon state ownership and social program residues of the socialist era. Overthrowing incumbent governments would require mobilisation of political dissidents around a single pro-Western

political candidate, close poll supervision, and sophisticated campaign propaganda techniques. One such effort, led by IRI, convinced Bulgaria's pro-Western parties in 1996 to rally behind a single politician, Petar Stoyanov. Together with NDI, IRI pursued the same approach in Romania (1997) and Croatia (1999), and in the case of Slovakia (1998), it required backing an anti-government coalition (MacKinnon 2007, 30-33). These successful interventions paved the way for the spate of 'colour revolutions' that followed in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and elsewhere.⁴

Branding Revolution

In reporting on Eastern Europe, Western media have fetishised the colour revolutions,⁵ helping to boost 'shock therapy' in opposition to socialist and economic nationalism in a heroic iconography of dissident political actions (Klein 2007). Much of the colour revolution symbolism bears echoes of the American non-violent civil rights struggles and 'flower power' resistance to U.S. imperialism. Anti-government protest in the United States, however, never drew a comparable level of U.S. media sympathy, not to mention foreign intervention. Indeed, whereas the massive protests in the United States in the 1960s were home-grown (despite the FBI's failed efforts to prove their Soviet origin), uprisings in Eastern Europe were never fully organic, nor were they, despite their portrayal, simply expressions of 'people power'. They were in fact foreign aided and to a significant extent foreign instigated. We found nothing in mainstream U.S. news reports that discussed this double standard.

All of the countries under our purview have had shaky political institutions centered on dominating personalities. Indeed, the State Department offensive against such heads of states as Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia and Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan destabilised people who just a few years earlier were lionised by the U.S. government as post-communist liberators, faithful IMF supporters, and pro-Western liberal democrats. Even Milošević had been touted by the CIA as 'a force for stability' in the early 1990s (MacKinnon 2007, 276). The successors to these official enemies, Koštunica, Saakashvili, Yushchenko, did little more to exercise democratic convictions than those they vanquished. Saakashvili 'replaced "superpresidential" institutions with even more highly concentrated "hyperpresidential" ones,' even attempting to ban all parties opposed to his pro-Western policy agenda (Hale 2006, 312).⁶ Koštunica and Yushchenko failed to constrain pandemic corruption.

Focusing on 'democracy promotion', we wish to deconstruct it as a term of propaganda in the employ of key state interests of the United States and the European Union -- not elaborated here but which include transnational economic integration, control over regional energy production and distribution, NATO membership and security initiatives, and the isolation of Russia. While Democrats

and Republicans offer the appearance of conflict in domestic politics, their international wings align very closely in efforts to break down political resistance to neoliberal restructuring in Eastern Europe and other countries undergoing 'transition'. Both sections of organized state power in the United States form parts of the 'Washington consensus' that an elitist, polyarchic, pro-Western political order is the appropriate corollary and necessary pre-condition for economic restructuring.

There is a caveat to our critical observations. By no means do we see the post-Soviet uprisings in Eastern Europe as simply foreign-orchestrated ('made in the USA') events. They did have local roots, based on residual resentments toward authoritarian power, corruption, limited intellectual freedom and economic opportunities, and other unfulfilled aspirations (including travel to the West) during the era of single (communist) party state socialism. (And much of this tension remains under the 'revolutionary' succession.) But at the same time, we find that the funding, advice, and general influence of powerful external agencies, particularly from the United States but also Western Europe, represent in many instances unwarranted intrusions, which forced at least short term outcomes designed for the preferences of the superpower and its allies. Foreign resources, opportunities, and symbolic forms of influence channel domestic talent, resources, and resistance movements into particular formations that would not otherwise occur.

In a study of international foundations, Joan Roelofs (2003) has argued that elections can not be considered free when there are significant foreign financial and other forms of leverage that undermine some candidates or parties and empower others. Surveying four types of foreign intervention, we find there is indeed reason to be skeptical about the U.S. 'democracy promotion' and 'freedom agenda' and the legitimacy of the immediate political outcomes of the 'colour revolutions'. Four types of foreign assistance that we studied are: (1) political; (2) financial; (3) technical training; and (4) marketing (propaganda).

(1) The Political Template

One of the keys to defeating what the United States considered an unworthy leader was the unification of the disparate opposition behind a single political candidate. NED's affiliated institutes, especially IRI and NDI, moved freely throughout Eastern Europe carrying this message of consolidation. The first template application was in Bulgaria in 1996, where NED and IRI 'discovered' that 'NGOs could tilt an election in favor of America's preferred candidate' (MacKinnon 2007, 30) by unifying the opposition and then creating and funding exit polls. NDI contributed to this project by financing the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights to oversee exit polls that year (NDI, 2001). Exit polling

was next arranged in Romania in 1997 through support to the Pro Democracy Association (Pro Democracy Association 2004); Slovakia in 1998, where the IRI conducted a 'parallel vote tabulation'; and Croatia in 1999, with USAID, NED, Freedom House, and other international financing of a poll watching group, Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections (GONG) (Jašić 2000; MacKinnon 2007, 31-33).

When Milošević looked vulnerable to election defeat in Serbia, NDI flew the Serbian opposition party leadership to Poland in the late 1990s to solicit advice from Polish party activists (Roelofs 2003, 186). The U.S. polling firm Penn, Schoen and Berland entered the picture and determined that the anti-communist constitutional lawyer Vojislav Koštunica was the most likely person to beat him (Dobbs 2000). Acting on this, U.S. secretary of state Madeline Albright and German foreign minister Joschka Fischer brought presidential contenders Belgrade mayor Zoran Djindjic and opposition party leader Vuk Draskovic to Budapest where the Serbian politicians were pressured to drop out of the race. IRI and NDI had issued similar counsel in Bulgaria and Romania, getting pro-Western leaders to defer to Washington's preference (MacKinnon 2007, 31, 44).

Youth movements and NGOs were also employed as couriers for regime change. Following the Serbian 'bulldozer revolution', several former foreign-trained members of the local *Otpor* student movement became traveling consultants on non-violent political tactics. The Serbians' trips to those countries were paid, respectively, by NED grantee Freedom House and Soros's Open Society Institute (MacKinnon 2007, 60, 67, 109, 110). Sensing another 'colour revolution' opportunity, Otpor advisors began working with Ukraine's opposition as early as 2002 (Bransten 2004).

In Georgia, and elsewhere in the region, polling 'exposure' was widely seen as helping to incite Shevardnadze's overthrow. John Tefft, deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, argued at a hearing of U.S. House Committee on International Relations in December 2004 that the Bush administration's bankrolling of exit polls in Georgia, Belarus, and Ukraine was designed to 'help to expose large-scale fraud'. But as two voting specialists skeptically observe, this same concern, for obvious reasons, was not expressed by the U.S. government about exit polls a month earlier that found presidential contender John Kerry winning the popular vote in the American election (Freeman and Mitteldorf 2005), nor did they draw comparisons with Gore's apparent and decisive victory, also based on exit polls, in Florida in the 2000 presidential election.

The Bush administration did not solely rely on exit polls to force Shevardnadze from power. In 2003, Republican Party troubleshooter, James Baker, was

dispatched by the White House to 'advise' his old acquaintance to give assurances that the upcoming presidential election would be 'free and fair', which is tantamount, in Mafia semiotics, to handing him a dead fish. Shevardnadze had been working on a plan to sell off part of Georgia's energy grid to Russia, a move that much displeased the Bush administration (Democracy Now! 2003). Meanwhile, American advisors were persuading opposition leader Zurab Zhvania to cede the candidate spotlight to a tested World Bank advocate, Mikhail Saakashvili.

In preparation for the 2004 Ukraine election, NDI pushed energy industry tycoon, Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukraine's so-called 'gas princess', to ally herself with presidential candidate, Viktor Yushchenko instead of running against him (MacKinnon 2007, 118, 155). U.S. advisors and local opposition relied on exit polls not so much to guarantee clean elections but as a mechanism for instigating 'orange revolution' protests. Anika Binnendijk and Ivan Marovic cite an internal memo written in April 2003 by Yushchenko's Our Ukraine in which his party discusses the importance of preparing a propaganda response to expected vote fraud:

[The elections will] be a game without rules, unprecedented competition of informational, organizational, financial and administrative resources for the regime...we need allies and at least 500,000 active supporters (Binnendijk and Marovic 2006).

The peripatetic American political consultant Dick Morris 'admitted to a clandestine meeting in an unnamed Eastern European capital with Yushchenko's team, at which he advised them that a big exit poll ... might ... help to bring protesters out into the streets if the exit poll indicated obvious ballot fraud' (Wilson 2006).⁷ Several local pollsters working on the 'national exit poll' were receiving Western assistance. These included the Razumkov Center, funded by NED and affiliated with Freedom House, and a think tank, the Democracy Initiatives Foundation, also a NED grantee as well as a recipient of other Western finance, which conducted a 'national exit poll' (Bandera 2006; McFaul 2006; NED 2004). KIIS is another local opinion polling firm, with U.S.-trained leadership, which counts USAID, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the U.S. State Department, and Coca-Cola among its former clients (Kiev International Institute of Sociology, no date). A Ukrainian NGO, Committee of Ukrainian Voters, which organized a parallel vote tabulation, had a working relationship with NDI (Committee of Ukrainian Voters, 2006; McFaul 2006).

(2) Financing Regime Change

Financing is the mother's milk of regime change, particularly for organising communications, media, and propaganda, staging protests, conducting poll watching, and managing the campaign of selected opposition candidates. With a commitment of \$23 million in USAID spending towards the strategic objective of 'democratic transition' in Serbia (with a population of 10 million) in 2000 (US Embassy in Yugoslavia 2002), the opposition was empowered and emboldened to contest the election and force Milošević from power. If there were any doubt about State Department objectives, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, its propaganda channel and website aimed at Central and Eastern Europe and Russia, was quite explicit. It declared that total U.S. government assistance to the anti-Milošević Serbian student movement Otpor and the Democratic Opposition of Serbia was \$10 million in 1999 and \$31 million in 2000 (Bacher 2002).⁸ George Soros's Open Society Institute provided the opposition an additional unspecified pool of money (Corwin 2005).

U.S. funding also supported ostensibly nonpartisan NGOs that were contesting Milošević's authority. One NGO, the Centre for Free Election and Democracy (CeSid), in fact worked hand-in-glove with the Democratic Opposition multiple political party alliance in Serbia (Cevallos 2001). CeSid was created by disgruntled anti-Milošević activists following the protests of 1996-1997 and was funded by Soros's Open Society Institute and NDI, which trained its leaders in Bulgaria (MacKinnon 2007, 41, 44, McFaul 2005). On election day, each Serbian poll monitor was paid five dollars (U.S. Institute of Peace 2004), a little more than the average daily wage.⁹

Other recipients of Western aid included the oppositionist Radio B92 (McClear, McClear, and Graves 2003, 19), the Association of Independent Electronic Media, which received NED funds for a campaign named 'Rock for Change, Rock the Vote', and the Belgrade Center for Human Rights, which also got a NED grant to 'encourage Serb academics, journalists and civic activists to participate directly in the formation of policy for the democratic political opposition' (NED 2006).¹⁰ NED has a link prominently featured on the Center's web page.

Georgia was next in line for the 'revolution' template. Following the Serbian revolt, one of CeSID's founders went to Georgia to help organize the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, another NDI- and Soros-funded exit polling body (MacKinnon 2007, 109). The *Wall Street Journal's* Hugh Pope commented that in Georgia's 2003 'rose revolution':

[F]raudulent elections provided a greater catalyst for popular outrage than [NGOs and activists] expected...largely because of U.S. and NGO-funded exit polls broadcast on Rustavi-2 TV, which showed everyone how pro-

Shevardnadze parties had stolen the election (quoted in Anable 2005).

Foreign funding for opposition entities in Georgia included a grant from the Open Society Institute, which paid members of the Serbian Otpor group to create and train the local *Kmara* youth group. Soros gave *Kmara* \$350,000 as 'start-up' cash and was also a major benefactor of Rustavi-2 and the newspaper, *24 Hours* (MacKinnon 2007, 109-110; Sussman 2006, 24).

Soros's Open Society Georgia Foundation's Election Support Program backing for *Kmara* focused mainly on the development of crucial political campaign staples, including TV ads, flyers, educational materials, and related paraphernalia. This funding segment amounted to \$175,000. Beyond this, both Soros and NED financed Georgia's free trade-oriented Liberty Institute (Kandelaki and Meladze 2007, 108, 112; NED 2007). Joining the effort to push Shevardnadze from power, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund suspended aid for Georgian development and revived their assistance program once Shevardnadze left office (Barker 2006).

In Ukraine, the U.S. spent in 2004 alone about \$34 million on regime change initiatives (U.S. Department of State 2004), while Soros pitched in about \$1.6 million in support of a local 'Freedom of Choice' NGO coalition and Ukraine's 'New Choice 2004' (Wilson 2005, 184). The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Freedom House, and the Canadian International Development Agency together provided \$130,000 for activist training (Kaskiv, Chupryna and Zolotariov, 2007, 134). Foreign assistance also staked various get-out-the-vote programs, including 'leaflet campaigns, street theatre, rock concerts, door-to-door campaigns, and karaoke shows' (Freedom House 2005). The Center for Political and Legal Reforms, financed by various U.S. foundations, linked its website directly to Yushchenko's home page 'under the heading "partners"', USAID brought the group to Washington, D.C. for three weeks of training in 'political advocacy' (Kelley 2004).

The most strategic of the three countries, Ukraine's regime change initiative enjoyed more funding, foreign and domestic, including large contributions from local millionaires who opposed the Kuchma government, than either Serbia or Georgia (MacKinnon 2007, 171). (Ukraine, however, has almost five times the population of Serbia and nearly ten times that of Georgia.) And again, much like the way large corporations in the United States spread their campaign contributions to both major parties, Western organizations in Ukraine distributed funding to more than one opposition group. The pro-Yushchenko *Pora* ('yellow' faction) student movement was one recipient of USAID and other foreign groups' support (Kaskiv, Chupryna, Bezverkha, and Zolotariov 2005); the more neutral-

sounding voter education program under the group Znayu, was another (USAID 2006).

(3) Training: The Professionalisation of Dissent

Planning for the overthrow of Milošević involved a highly coordinated effort by local and foreign agencies. A Western-funded international conference on Serbia's future was held in Bratislava in 1999, co-organized by the U.S.-based East West Institute and the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The East West Institute is a conservative think tank whose honorary chairmen are George W. Bush and Helmut Kohl and whose purpose is 'to help support the development of democracy and free enterprise in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia' (Peace Direct 2005). Following the conference, a task force was organized to build connections between pro-Western Serbian entities and organizations in the international community, including the Council of Europe, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, and the European Parliament (Minić and Dereta 2007, 89-90).

Regional coalition-building, funded and overseen by foreign donor agencies, was part of a broader strategy to remove vestiges of the Russia-leaning old guard. America's Development Foundation, essentially a non-profit (oddly labeled an 'NGO') under the wing of USAID, together with the State Department, NED, and other 'democracy promotion' groups, used USAID/Romania funds to start a program in 2000 called 'Romanians for Serbian Democracy', linking Serbian opposition NGOs with their Romanian counterparts (America's Development Foundation, 2007).

Throughout the region, media training has been vital in pursuing U.S. foreign policy objectives and local regime change movements. During the 1990s, USAID's media assistance to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics amounted to \$175 million (Hoffman 2002). In preparation for Milošević's overthrow, the United States in 1999 was spending 'more than \$1 per Serb' on media assistance (McClear, McClear, and Graves 2003, 14) as a way of destabilising the Serbian government. As USAID explained:

The goal of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) was to fund programs and media outlets that could disseminate messages pushing immediate political change. USAID/OTI characterised its activities as 'pushing the reform agenda' (cited in McClear, McClear, and Graves 2003, 30).

In Serbia, according to a local marketing professional, 'every word of the opposition's one-minute and five-minute core political messages used by opposition spokesmen across the country was discussed with U.S. consultants and tested by opinion poll'. Anti-Milošević candidates and supporters 'received

extensive training on how to stay 'on message,' answer journalists' questions and rebut the arguments of Milosevic supporters'. Youth group activists with American-paid training were taught how to handle journalists (Dobbs 2000). Various U.S.-government media training grants were channeled through Freedom House, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), Internews, and other American and local groups in Ukraine and Georgia (Mitchell 2006; U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, no date).

Several Eastern European political groups involved in regime change used non-violent organizing tactics adapted from the writings of a controversial American author on the subject, Gene Sharp. A former research professor at Harvard University, Sharp is the founder of a strangely named research center in Boston called the Albert Einstein Institute, which claims Gandhi as its inspirational mentor. In 2004, AEI printed 12,000 vernacular language copies of Sharp's manifesto for non-violent regime change,¹¹ *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, for the use of opposition forces in Ukraine (AEI 2004, 12).

USAID and Freedom House additionally funded the publication and dissemination of 5,000 copies for the Eastern European region. Otpor adapted parts of Sharp's earlier book, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, for a document they called the 'Otpor User Manual' (Bacher 2002). In the summer of 2000, the International Republican Institute brought Sharp's AEI colleague, Robert Helvey, to Budapest to train Otpor in strategic nonviolence (U.S. Institute of Peace 2000).¹² Activists trained at this seminar then returned to Serbia, where they provided training in fear management and strategic nonviolence every week until the 2000 election (Miller 2001). The Ukrainian youth group Pora was said to have considered Sharp's book their 'bible' (Strijbosch 2004).

In Georgia, the U.S. assistance community claimed to be only indirectly supporting oppositional movements, such as through training for journalists and judges (USAID 2006). There were several options short of direct intervention, and Liberty Institute leader Levan Ramishvili credited US assistance with preparing a broad network of people to join Georgia's 'rose revolution' (USAID 2006). As one example, U.S. and other foreign NGOs enabled Slovakian veterans of the civic action group 'OK '98' to visit and consult with Georgia's opposition forces to set the stage for the overthrow of Shevardnadze (Kandelaki and Meladze 2007, 106). And, as in Serbia, U.S. assistance programs largely excluded non-opposition forces. In total, the U.S. spent \$2.4 million on Georgia's 2004 election (MacKinnon 2007, 114). Regime change initiatives in that country drew additional financial support from the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe (Herd 2005).

Following the successful overthrow of Shevardnadze, David Dettman, NDI director in Kyiv, flew to Tbilisi to consult with the NDI's Georgia director to discuss whether a similar 'revolution' could happen in Ukraine. Dettman determined that it could and later helped organize training camps for the Ukrainian youth movement, run by Serbian Otpor activists and paid for by the British Westminster Foundation. (Otpor training camps in Ukraine would be subsequently bankrolled by Freedom House) (MacKinnon 2007, 172, 184). Georgian experts also arrived to assist the Ukrainian anti-Kuchma (and his designated successor, Yanukovich) rebellion. A former Georgian Liberty Institute official, Gigi Targamadze, visited Kyiv along with several Georgian Kmara youth activists, while Pora is said to have sent a contingent to Tbilisi for training (Anjaparidze 2005). The logistics were financed with U.S. assistance (MacKinnon 2007, 172).

(4) Marketing the Revolution

'I did not think I should have paid serious attention to these young people running around with flags and making graffiti on the streets. I was wrong'. So spoke Eduard Shevardnadze, deposed president of Georgia (quoted in Kandelaki 2007). Shevardnadze, like Milošević before and Yanukovich after him, was unprepared for the modern mode of political propaganda and government displacement.

In the West, Otpor's anti-Milošević campaign was celebrated for its masterful marketing and branding techniques.¹³ The slogans that Otpor activists recited and spray painted on walls were first tested by opinion polls and vetted by American advisors. Otpor and Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) spokespeople were taught how to handle journalists and 'stay on message'. DOS's marketing specialist, Milan Stevanovic, said of the instrumental uses of communication: 'The foreign support was critical...this was the first campaign where our strategy was based on real scientific research' (Dobbs 2000).

Reasoning that brands were more powerful than even charismatic leadership, Otpor organizers enlisted twenty-odd revolving surrogates (Stefanovic 2000), who represented their organization with prepared logos and messages. As one of the Otpor leaders, Ivan Marovic, explained to National Public Radio's Bob Garfield:

In the 20th Century, branding was done by connecting a movement to the leader, so everybody remembers Lech Walesa or, or Nelson Mandela, or Mahatma Gandhi. In Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, branding was done not by connecting to leaders. Leaders could have been blackmailed or bribed or even maybe killed. You can't do that with brands or ideas (Garfield 2004).

A new mode of electioneering on behalf of Otpor came from the Serbian company Strategic Marketing (currently a joint venture with the American market research firm, A.C. Nielsen, and British PGM Consulting), 'which ran a series of

focus groups on behalf of the opposition coalition and the Otpor student resistance movement with financial support from Western democracy groups'. Strategic Marketing had the clear imprint of an American style ad campaign. Every one of Otpor's and the other opposition groups' pretested 'core messages' were designed to 'sell' regime change much in the same way that soft drinks are marketed. Srdan Bogosavljevic, CEO of Strategic Marketing, said 'We approached the process with a brand to sell and a brand to beat...The brand to sell was Koštunica. The brand to beat was Milošević' (Dobbs 2000).

Otpor's black-and-white fist logo was graffitied on walls, printed on stickers, emblazoned on t-shirts, and copied by Georgia's Kmara student resistance group. USAID paid for 80 tons of stickers reading '*Gotov je*' (He's finished), which young Otpor activists pasted on every available flat surface throughout Serbia (Dobbs 2000). The American producers of a propaganda film about the fall of Milošević, 'Bringing Down a Dictator', boasted that Otpor 'became a ubiquitous brand-name, as familiar as Coca-Cola and Nike' (Ackerman, DuVall, York, and Zimmerman 2000). Otpor co-founder, Ivan Marovic, concurred: 'Our idea was to use corporate branding in politics...The movement has to have a marketing department. We took Coca-Cola as our model' (quoted in Traynor 2005).

The Otpor trained youth movements in Georgia (Kmara) and Ukraine (Pora) repeated the marketing tactics in their own countries. Otpor activist Aleksandar Maric boasted: 'We trained them [Ukrainian youth opposition] in how to set up an organization, how to open local chapters, how to create a 'brand,' how to create a logo, symbols, and key messages' (quoted in Bransten 2004). Pora received \$500,000 from Freedom House, while a Ukrainian opposition group, Znayu, was given \$50,000 from Freedom House and \$1 million from the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation to start a teaser-type advertising campaign in seventeen Ukrainian cities. 'Znayu was one of our larger projects in terms of visibility, but it was really just a small part of our whole work', commented an election specialist from Freedom House in Kiev, Juhani Grossman (MacKinnon 2007, 174).

For Grossman, U.S. intervention in the political affairs of another country is fair game. If the United States helps Ukraine's pro-Western free trade advocates Yushchenko and Tymoshenko to gain power, the rationale is that it's just a matter of evening the score against alleged vote rigging by the nationalist leader Yanukovych. For the United States, the ends of the 'revolutionary' template are to secure openings in the region for expanded political, military, and economic opportunities; the means, involving clever uses of propaganda, resulted in short-term gains but in light of the backlash against democracy assistance overall in the region, possibly a long-term defeat of those objectives, particularly if the democratic standards of the most active donor country are at home in decline.

Conclusion: Templates of Political Economic and Military Dominion

There are certain core assumptions underlying the U.S. program of “democracy promotion’. We address here three of them. The first is that democracy consists of a set of universal, interchangeable, and transferable procedures that formulate a democratic transition. As in ‘shock therapy’, standard electoral practices under this assumption can be rapidly assimilated via training in any willing population. This would seem to suggest that democracy is ‘creationist’, not evolutionary in character. A democratic governing structure in this view can more or less be transplanted wholesale by a donor country and not require organic political and economic development rooted in specific contexts and changing, adaptive cultural mores and practices over time. In fact, the history of post-colonialism does not provide convincing evidence that Western institutional and procedural democracy transfers were effectively adopted by the new states of the Third World. The current unstable political conditions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine suggest that ‘democracy promotion’ is no more successful in former communist-run states.

A second, related assumption is the appropriateness of powerful foreign states to intervene politically, financially, culturally, institutionally, and often militarily to rid target countries of undesirable, ‘undemocratic’ leaders. The U.S. ambassador to Hungary during George Bush senior’s administration remarked in 1989: “I’m open about supporting the opposition parties, including getting money for them from the National Endowment for Democracy’, and added, ‘I think we should be proud of it’ (Kamm 1989). This presumes a moral hierarchy within the international system, such that individual states or an association of states have the right of intervention at their choosing in order, presumptively, to defend the rights of people against brutal state violence or repression.

Although such a principle does exist in international law (eg., conventions against genocide), it is rarely practiced; indeed, its antithesis, the avoidance of interference with the many states that routinely violate the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is commonplace. Existing political conditions in Eastern Europe may be far from the democratic ideal, but even USAID acknowledges that American political party practices would not satisfy the measure of democracy it seeks to export: ‘A strict standard of organizational democracy would not be met by either of the two major parties in the United States’ (USAID 1999, 39). This ‘realist’ aspect of U.S. foreign policy has led to aggressive pursuit of regime change in socialist or nationalist states but has tended to leave unimpeded market economies that routinely violate fundamental human rights, including the repressive governing systems in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Pakistan, China, Singapore, and Kazakhstan, and many allied dictatorships in the recent past.

In the Eastern European ‘target of opportunity’ interventions, there is a decided bias in favor of certain economic, military, and strategic political objectives, which casts grave doubt on the democratic motives of the principal U.S. donor institutions. Of the \$15.9 billion allocated by USAID for its Support for East European Democracy and Freedom Support Act programs by 2003 in support of market democracies in the CEE region, 53% was targeted to economic reform and only 17% explicitly for democracy building (Rieffer and Mercer 2005, 398). The NATO arms market for the region in 1997 was worth ‘at least US\$35 billion’, with an estimate of NATO arms sales to the CEE countries over the following 10-15 years reaching as high as \$125 billion. According to one study at the time: ‘Prospective new [CEE] NATO countries are being pressured to purchase advanced weaponry that will not meet their legitimate security needs and that will instead jeopardise stability in the region’ (Ruecker 1997).

To support such anticipated windfalls, it follows that placement of neoliberal, pro-Western leaders in positions of state power would be indispensable, irrespective of their firm commitments to participatory democracy. More likely, as William Robinson (1996) suggests, the version of democracy implanted would be polyarchy, an elitist structure of access that minimises government regulation of external organizations and their local internationalist NGO counterparts and other local political and economic interest groups. In the eyes of U.S. state planners, democracy is defined in terms of capitalist markets and WTO trade rules. A U.S. National Security Strategy paper in 2002 declared that ‘The U.S. will use this moment of opportunity [post-9/11] to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world’ (cited in Kennedy and Lucas 2005, 325).

A third assumption is that where electoral intervention occurs, propaganda exercises, as forms of ‘soft power’, are legitimate forms of political information and education. The deployment of ‘revolutionary’ symbols and slogans, selected for their agitating and mobilising effects, financial support to local media outlets to stir up antagonism, and the foreign training of dissenters and professional organization of dissent are some of the stratagems in regime change initiatives. As local organizers readily admitted, marketing tactics were key to winning over their supporters. The use of Western-funded exit polls served as a catalyst for protest. On a broader front, the steady flow of anti-government reporting from the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the BBC World Service, and other Western broadcasting media incited activists to take to the streets. One could add to the template the efforts of U.S. government and private foundation visitor programs for Eastern European politicians, journalists, students, academics, cultural and athletic performers, and others, which tend to animate their support

for Western-oriented political, economic, and cultural institutional practices (Roelofs 2003).

In the short term, Western intervention distorts rather than facilitates democratic change in Eastern Europe. In Ukraine's 2007 parliamentary election, Viktor Yanukovich, the *bête noire* of the U.S. and E.U. in 2004, hired a Republican political consulting firm, led by Paul Manafort, to run his presidential campaign. His rival, incumbent president Viktor Yushchenko, had the services of Bill Clinton's former pollster, Stanley Greenberg. When American campaign experts show up, corporate-financed politics and its neoliberal agenda can't be far behind.

Notes

¹ We consider terms such as "colour revolution," "democracy promotion," and similar lexicon as expressions of propaganda, with weak foundations in the real meaning of the radical social transformations that are implied in their historical usage.

² Beyond Europe, one of NED's first successful tests of non-violent intervention occurred in the Philippines, where, in 1986, the United States withdrew support for the Marcos dictatorship and helped organize an election that would bring a pro-American, liberal democratic leader, Corazon Aquino, to power and force Marcos into exile. NED later came under greater scrutiny in Congress when it was found in 1989 to be surreptitiously funding Nicaraguan opposition candidate, Violeta Chamorro. Critics accused NED of partisan meddling, after which its leaders promised to restrict the organization to civil society-building in the future (Conry 1993).

³ We do not discuss the failed U.S./E.U. effort to overthrow the Lukashenko government in Belarus. It is likely that the country's relatively stable economy, without the benefit of American neoliberal economic 'shock therapy' is why Lukashenko has retained legitimacy. However, Lukashenko has been banned from visiting the United States or any of the E.U. states.

⁴ A U.S. plan of transporting activists from one nation to another to teach "revolutionary" electoral tactics may have started in 1997 when the NED arranged a Vienna meeting between Slovakia's oppositionist leader Pavol Demeš and veterans of Bulgaria's recent pro-Western elections. Demeš returned home and designed "OK'98," the Slovakian campaign which brought down Vladimir Mečiar. Demeš next went on to train GONG, a Croatian NGO aimed overthrowing Franjo Tudjman (MacKinnon 2007, 31, 34).

⁵ Portugal in 1976 underwent an anti-rightist uprising, branding it the "carnation revolution."

⁶ In May 2006, during a visit to Kazakhstan to secure oil routes that would bypass Russia, Dick Cheney praised the "political development" of that country, just one day after condemning the Russian government for using "intimidation" in its oil politics (Greenberg and Kramer 2006).

⁷ American consultants are now central to Ukrainian politics. Andrew Wilson found that subsequent to the 2004 election, Ukraine's "bigger parties hired fewer Russian political technologists and more US K Street consultants. I leave you to judge whether that is progress" (Wilson 2007).

⁸ The IRI focused their efforts on Otpor, while NDI concentrated on opposition parties in Serbia (Dobbs 2000). \$31 million may not seem like much, but Serbia has less than 10 million people. That would be the equivalent of a nearly \$1 billion (in year 2000 dollars) foreign contribution to an American national election. And that does not include other government and non-government sources of foreign spending.

⁹ CeSid's funding base read like a who's who of the "democracy promotion" community: USAID, NED, NDI, IRI, Westminster Foundation, German Marshall Fund, Freedom House, Open Society Institute, and other Western public and private organizations (CeSid 2007). The United States Institute for Peace provided some of the training for CeSID in the 2000 Serbian election, and IRI prepared 400 election monitors, who then trained another 15,000 monitors. The United States footed the entire bill (Dobbs 2000).

¹⁰ Other grants on the NED website include a 2000 grant to the Student Union of Serbia to encourage "greater student involvement...for democratic reform" and a grant to the NDI to help the Alliance for Change publish a newspaper called "Changes."

¹¹ A distinction has to be made between the casually employed term "revolution" and regime change. A revolution is understood to involve a radical transformation of power constituents and of society as a whole, as in a class-based upheaval.

¹² Sharp is closely affiliated, through AEI, with two other non-violent regime change activists in Eastern Europe, Peter Ackerman and Robert Helvey. Ackerman, a former associate of Michael Milken at Drexel Burnham, founded the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict in 2002, became the chair of Freedom House in 2005, and served on the board of AEI. Helvey, a former Army colonel, was president of AEI from 2003-2005 and was active as an advisor in Myanmar (as military attaché), Serbia (Otpor leadership training Otpor), and Iraq (working with political opposition to overthrow Saddam).

¹³ Peter Ackerman, for example, while on the AEI board lauded the symbolic actions of Otpor in his made-for-television documentary, "Bringing Down a Dictator." He later became more actively involved in the region through his strategic non-violent action training organization, the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict.

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