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Nonviolent Resistance and Repression: Examining Civil Resistance and Authoritarian Adaptation in Post-Soviet States

Abstract: The article underscores the significance of comprehending how leaders in post-USSR nations, including Vladimir Putin, Alexander Lukashenko, and Nursultan Nazarbayev, solidified their regimes through the suppression and dismantling of civil societies within their respective countries. Additionally, the article delves into the repression mechanisms employed by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories (TOT) of Ukraine, focusing on the suppression of the pro-Ukrainian population and the opposition to Ukrainian civil resistance.

Given the effectiveness of civil resistance in overthrowing authoritarian regimes in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), the repressive tactics of these regimes have evolved to prevent and suppress any potential for similar events, such as the colour revolutions, from occurring. The chosen theoretical framework for this study encompasses the smart repression mechanism proposed by Lee A. Smithey and Lester R. Kurtz that range from overtly violent tactics to more nuanced approaches, gradually reducing the outrage associated with repression or utilising familiar norms to discourage resistance.

The research findings show that each country carefully devised repressive strategies, deliberately choosing softer methods for certain targets while resorting to outright violence when the situation deteriorated. Meanwhile, Russian occupying forces in

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Ukraine mainly relied on violence and intimidation for repression. Consequently, recommendations for the organisation of Total defence are provided.

Keywords: civil resistance, nonviolent movements, repression on occupied territories, total defence.

Introduction

Between 2000 and 2005, a wave of popular uprisings known as the colour revolutions led to the ousting of four leaders in post-Communist countries from power: Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia (2000), Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia (2003), Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine (2004), and Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan (2005). These movements characterised by peaceful protests aimed at achieving democratic reforms in government. Notably, nonviolent resistance proved effective against the powerful repression apparatus of these (semi)-authoritarian regimes.

However, other political regimes have demonstrated effective resilience against societal opposition. For example, Putin's regime in Russia endured for 24 years, Lukashenka's in Belarus for 30 years, and Nazarbayev's lasted in Kazakhstan for 27 years, despite repeated attempts by the political opposition and civil society to bring about change. More recently, Russia has successfully suppressed Ukrainian resistance in the temporarily occupied territories (hereafter TOT), which was fierce after the beginning of full-scale invasion and was characterised by intense civil protests and disobedience.

Recent decades have seen a surge in academic interest in the effectiveness of civil resistance. Numerous studies now explore the factors that influence the success or failure of nonviolent movements. This growing academic focus coincides with some countries, particularly those bordering aggressive powers, embracing the concept of Total Defence. This concept emphasises the participation of government agencies, private and commercial enterprises, voluntary organisations, and individuals at all

levels of society. Total defence requires the active participation of the local population in nonviolent resistance within occupied territories.

This article examines the dynamics of civil resistance in post-Soviet states with long-standing authoritarian regimes: Russia (24 years), Belarus (30 years), and Kazakhstan (formerly 27 years, under Nazarbayev). It also analyses the Ukrainian case of the TOT to investigate whether Russia replicates its domestic repressive methods the occupation of external territories during military occupation.

Drawing on theories about successful nonviolent resistance by Gene Sharp, Erica Chenoweth, and Maria Stephan, the article examines the strategies employed by the governments of these countries to counter nonviolent resistance, as analysed through Lee A. Smithey and Lester R. Kurtz's approach of smart repression. By studying these repressive mechanisms, the aim is to draw insights into how these post-Soviet countries have adapted to counter pro-democracy movements and prevent dissent among the population. Finally, it will explore alternative approaches for countries considering incorporating civil resistance in their Total Defence strategies.

What is civil resistance?

Erica Chenoweth defines civil resistance as a 'method of active conflict in which unarmed people use a variety of coordinated, noninstitutional methods - strikes, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, alternative institution-building, and many other tactics to promote change without harming or threatening to harm an opponent'. This definition reflects the most important components of civil resistance. (Chenoweth, 2021 pp. 1-7)

1. Civil resistance is a method of **active conflict** used by individuals or groups to achieve their goals. It stipulates undermining the pillars of power of the opponent.

2. Civil resistance involves **unarmed civilians** who use their creativity to **affect their opponents without violence**. At the same time, the term *civil* does not directly stipulate a friendly or polite attitude. Different combinations of social, economic, cultural, and political leverage affect different pillars of power of the opponent.

3. Civil resistance uses various methods to build power and leverage from below, aiming for long-term transformation. Only protesting in the streets or organising a single protest or strike does not constitute civil resistance. Instead, it involves deliberate and coordinated actions of social, psychological, economic, and political leverage, such as boycotts, strikes, protests, sit-ins, stay-aways, and other acts of civil disobedience and noncooperation.

4. Civil resistance stipulates **actions outside existing institutions,** such as disobeying laws and authorities that are viewed as unjust or unlawful. It refers to actions not conducted through official channels and may involve unauthorised marches, violation of laws, labour strikes, tax refusal, boycotting of goods, or building seizing. Also, civil resistance campaigns may combine institutional and unauthorised actions, multiplying each other's effects. Noteworthy, movements relying only on institutional actions, such as rallying for political candidates or writing letters to public officials, can not be considered civil resistance movements.

5. Civil resistance aims to **transform the status quo** through revolutionary means. Usually, it is conducted by a coalition of individuals representing claims on a broader community's behalf. For instance, the civil rights movement aimed to change the entire system of racial inequality in the United States, while the Sudanese Revolution fought for democratic changes in all Sudanese society.

Civil resistance can gain leverage over their adversaries by mobilising large numbers of people and applying systematic nonviolent sanctions, affecting the opponent's ability to maintain the status quo. Kurt Schock defines leverage in nonviolent civil resistance as 'the ability to mobilise the withdrawal of support from opponents or invoke pressure against them through the networks upon which opponents depend for power' (Schock, 2005). Elisabeth Wood describes the disruptive effect of civil resistance as raise of political, economic, and military costs for an adversary to maintain the status quo by the failure of the government to perform basic functions, a decline in GDP, investment, and tax revenues, loss of power by government elites, and the breakdown of the regular order of society (Wood, 2000).

However, the power of nonviolent resistance does not rely on disrupting the social order through violence. Instead, it is based on continuously protesting and refusing to cooperate, which leads to the removal of the opponent's essential sources of power. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan argue that campaigns of nonviolent civil resistance tend to enjoy mass, broad-based support and 'mass defections by erstwhile regime supporters, who see a future in supporting a growing opposition movement as opposed to supporting the regime or a relatively small group of armed oppositionists'. (Chenoweth, et al., 2011 p. 46)

Sharp's theory of power stipulates that people can be categorised into rulers and subjects. The rulers' power is derived from the consent of the subjects. Individuals may challenge such issues as dictatorship, oppression, occupation and even genocide by withdrawing consent. Sharp argues that power is not something a ruler individually poses but exists in different groups and locations, which he calls *loci of power*. Consent is vital for the ruler to maintain power and depends on obedience and cooperation. The ruler identifies authority, human resources, skills and knowledge, material resources, sanctions, and intangible factors – habits, social norms, and beliefs – as the existential sources of power. The obedience of subjects is essential for any government to maintain control. Consequently, the actions of nonviolent resistance, amounting to a refusal to obey, might lead to the collapse of the ruler's power (Sharp, 1973).

Similarly, Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth's theory contradicts the belief that violence against more powerful opponents is the best way for resistance groups to achieve their goals. Instead, they argue that nonviolent civil resistance can be a powerful alternative to political violence, effectively challenging both democratic and non-democratic adversaries. In fact, in some cases, nonviolent resistance can be even more effective than violence (Chenoweth, et al., 2011).

The two scholars created the 'Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes' (NAVCO) data project. This unique initiative systematically collects data on violent insurgencies and nonviolent civil resistance campaigns worldwide. Their finding shows that nonviolent campaigns have been successful 53 percent of the time, with a success rate twice higher than violent resistance campaigns, which have only been

successful 26%. They also provided two reasons nonviolent campaigns could be more effective than violent ones. First, nonviolent resistance can gain more support from both domestic and international communities as it is seen as more legitimate. This perception can lead to increased pressure on the target regime and greater internal and external support for the resistance group, which weakens the regime's power sources. Second, nonviolent campaigns are less likely to face violent countermeasures from the regime, as they are perceived as less extreme and more willing to negotiate. This consideration makes concessions through bargaining easier, whereas violent resistance is more likely to be met with violent suppression by the regime (Chenoweth, et al., 2011). Also, they suggest that mass participation in a resistance campaign can activate mechanisms that improve the chances of success. They are:

- Loyalty shifts among regime supporters
- Backfiring of the nonviolent resistance campaign due to the oppressor's violent crackdown
- International sanctions against an oppressor and external support for the resistance movement
- Tactical diversity and innovation of civil resistance methods.

Methods of civil resistance

Civil resistance encompasses diverse methods and strategies to confront injustice, champion human rights, and advance democratic ideals. It ranges from mass mobilisation and economic disruption to acts of civil disobedience, cultural activism, and digital hacktivism.

Gene Sharp, in his book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part Two: The Methods of Nonviolent Action*, which was published in 1973, outlines 198 techniques of nonviolent action and divides them into three categories:

- **Protest and persuasion**, which cover a range of methods, including the issuing of formal declarations, group presentations, leaflet printing and distribution, displaying symbols, art performances (drama, music, humour, etc.), processions, commemorating the

deceased, and holding public assemblies. Nowadays, they can be supplemented by blog writings, participating in protest groups on social media, participating in digital hacktivism, and disseminating banned or censored information via text messaging.

- **Noncooperation**. This category includes tactics such as conducting social or economic boycotts, labour strikes, avoiding participation in rigged elections, and declining to acknowledge the legitimacy of a government in any possible way.

- **Intervention**. These tactics include hunger strikes, street sit-ins, occupying offices, intentionally seeking imprisonment, and overwhelming administrative services. Live streaming of an opponent's misconduct or fraud from cell phones to internet sites could be prominent examples of contemporary intervention tactics.

However, as society and technologies developed, it became obvious that Sharp's initial 198 methods still needed to be completed. For instance, digital communication revolutionised nonviolent resistance tactics with the introduction of the internet, mobile phones, and social media. The use of modern electronic media has broadened the reach of nonviolent actions, impacting both tactics and messaging. The current 'Nonviolent Tactics Database' of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict includes more than 346 methods of nonviolent resistance (Beer, 2021). They categorise them as follows:

- Saying (acts of expression). Communicative actions to criticise, coerce or persuade. Include different expressive tactics to attract attention: flash mobs, public assemblies, rituals, performances, printing products, graffiti, et al.

- Not doing (acts of omission). Include any action with the aim of refusing to engage in expected behaviour (examples: strikes and boycotts, election omitting, rejection of authority, et al).

- Doing and creating (acts of commission). Those are direct actions confronting another party to stop, disrupt, or change their behaviour

(examples: a blockade of communication or movement, overloading of services or facilities, nonviolent occupation of buildings, et al).

Each can be enacted in confrontational (coercive) or constructive (persuasive) ways.

According to Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan's theory, the more diverse social groups that participate in a campaign, the more likely they will develop new strategies and diversify their tactics of nonviolent resistance (Chenoweth, et al., 2011 p. 55). They suggest that the peculiarity of tactical diversity in nonviolent resistance refers to the transitioning between strategies that either focus on concentration or dispersion methods of nonviolent resistance. To this point:

Concentration methods involve the mobilisation of a large number of individuals in public areas to engage in civil resistance (Schock, 2005 p. 51). Examples of this technique include historical events such as Gandhi's Salt March in India in the 1930s, the Orange Revolution's mass sit-ins in Maidan Square in Kyiv in 2004 and 2013, the formation of a tent city during the Lebanese Independence Intifada in 2005, and extensive gatherings in Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution of 2011.

Dispersion methods involve nonviolent actions conducted over a larger area with a lower concentration of people. They may include consumer boycotts, stay-aways, and go-slow actions in the workplace. Those methods force the opponents to spread their repressive measures and resources over a broader region, allowing for the participants' anonymity and enabling them to engage in less hazardous activities. Examples of dispersion methods include the South African consumer boycotts in 1959, oil workers' strikes during the Iranian revolution in 1979, and the Chileans' banging of pots and pans during the anti-Pinochet movement.

According to Kurt Schock, both violent and nonviolent campaigns benefit from using a variety of tactics to decrease the effectiveness of the opposition's repressive measures and enable the campaign to maintain initiative over the situation (Schock, 2005 p. 144). Tactical innovation improves a campaign's flexibility and ability to respond when the state targets a specific set of tactics, which is especially important

when certain tactics, such as street protests, become highly perilous due to repression.

In conclusion, nonviolent campaigns that switch between different tactics have more options for threatening their opponents by maintaining pressure and strategic initiative. This flexibility and creativity help them outmanoeuvre the adversary and stay resilient to repression.

The role of nonviolent civil resistance in the Total Defence concept

The *Resistance Operating Concept* (ROC) is a conceptual document that aims to establish authorised and organised resistance capabilities within a country before an invasion occurs. Besides developing and activating partisan operations within occupied territories, the ROC outlines the active participation of the local population in nonviolent resistance. The topicality of nonviolent resistance in case of external occupation derives from the thesis that the occupying power, even when it threatens the use of physical force, depends on the voluntary assistance and cooperation of the local population. Moreover, one of the governmental objectives before and during a crisis is to educate and persuade the population to refuse to cooperate with the occupier and its agents.

According to the ROC, the main objective of nonviolent resistance 'is to create situations that will involve public opinion and direct it against the occupying power' (Fiala, 2020 p. 69). As a result, it will lower the morale of the occupying security forces and their governmental officials and decrease their capabilities to control occupied territories (*Ibid.*).

As a framework for nonviolent resistance, the ROC utilises a classification of methods, according to Gene Sharp, which may include protests and persuasion, intervention, and noncooperation, depending on the conditions established by occupational authorities (Fiala, 2020 p. 99).

Smart repression against civil resistance.

Repression against civil resistance movements conducted by authorities has been a subject of significant study. It is common to see scenes of protesters being met with

violence and aggressive tactics, capturing the world's attention. However, these repressive actions can sometimes backfire, creating sympathy and support for the movement or even producing loyalty shifts among the regime's supporters. In response, authorities have started employing a new *smart repression* strategy to suppress resistance while avoiding unintended consequences. Lee A. Smithey and Lester R. Kurtz describe the use of tactics by authorities that are deliberately crafted to demobilise movements while mitigating or eliminating a backfire effect as a *smart repression* (Smithey, et al., 2018).

The authors propose a continuum of methods for disbanding a movement, ranging from extreme violence aimed at instilling fear in challengers and potential participants on one end to deliberate efforts to make people accept and support a regime's authority on the other end (*Figure 1*).
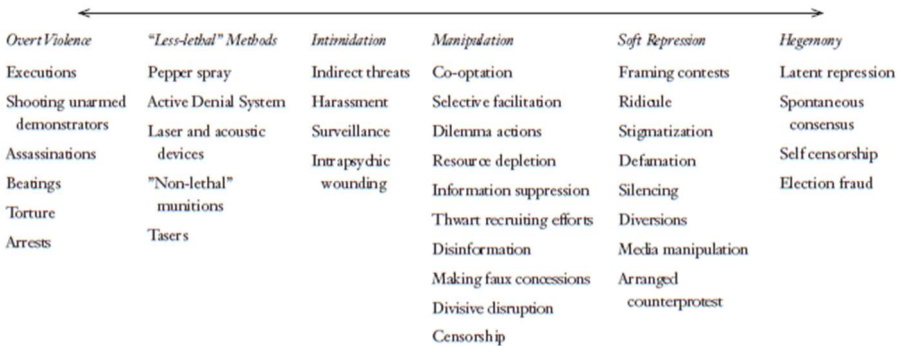
Overt Violence	*"Less-lethal" Methods*	*Intimidation*	*Manipulation*	*Soft Repression*	*Hegemony*
Executions	Pepper spray	Indirect threats	Co-optation	Framing contests	Latent repression
Shooting unarmed demonstrators	Active Denial System	Harassment	Selective facilitation	Ridicule	Spontaneous consensus
Assassinations	Laser and acoustic devices	Surveillance	Dilemma actions	Stigmatization	Self censorship
Beatings	"Non-lethal" munitions	Intrapsychic wounding	Resource depletion	Defamation	Election fraud
Torture	Tasers		Information suppression	Silencing	
Arrests			Thwart recruiting efforts	Diversions	
			Disinformation	Media manipulation	
			Making faux concessions	Arranged counterprotest	
			Divisive disruption		
			Censorship		

Figure 1. A continuum of demobilisation.
Source: (Smithey, et al., 2018 p. 191)

The most extreme forms of repression include **overt violence** like assassinations, beatings, arrests, use of water jets, dogs, and live fire against protesters. While these actions remove protesters from the streets by incapacitating or arresting them, their main purpose is to prevent others from joining protests. Although this type of repression attracts significant media and public attention and often backfires, it can

also effectively demobilise or even eliminate a movement that cannot effectively respond to such repression.

Overt repression also poses many challenges for the authorities, which they try to mitigate. The main challenge is a need to legitimise harm toward others and evade accountability for engaging in morally questionable actions. Such accountability is relevant to both decision-makers and security forces personnel.

Less-lethal methods may include rubber bullets, pepper sprays, stun guns, and any devices and methods to disperse individuals and crowds. Security forces may find non-lethal methods more comfortable to utilise as they decrease the psychological distress of the application of violence and may mitigate a negative public reaction. The main aim of using non-lethal methods may be maintaining a balance between the control of the movement and protecting against any backfiring. However, these actions may shape public opinion differently, depending on how a movement crafts the narrative about their usage and how they are depicted in the media.

Intimidation usually stipulates the direct use of violence, which can expressed in physical, verbal, or written forms, in order to create an effect when a single person or a group are limited in their actions due to strong cognitive considerations about the consequences of current or planned activities. Intimidation may be applied against members of nonviolent resistance movements in such forms as harassment, surveillance, and tax investigations to coerce them to abandon their activities. Eric L. Nelson suggested that intimidation can be overt and covert. The first one runs the risk of backfiring, while the second one is less overt, exemplified by actions such as threats to sue, arrest or evict, or more sophisticated tactics such as deploying community or civil relations officers in recognisable uniforms, parking agent-filled vehicles near targets, or publicly following individuals (Nelson, 2012).

Authorities may use indirect threats and redirection to avoid repression dilemmas. By decreasing attendance at contentious events, the movement's popularity wanes, protesters become marginalised, and there may be fewer witnesses to repression, depending on media coverage. For example, Russian authorities posed an indirect threat by mandating exams in December 2011 to dissuade the youth from participating in protests against unjust elections. This tactic diverted potential

protesters and utilised educational institutions to obscure social control, exploiting implicit threats.

There are no limits to the potential variety of covert tactics. Hence, they depend on the creativity of the repressing authority and the situation in which they are conducted.

Manipulation includes such techniques as co-optation, selective facilitation, dilemma actions, resource depletion, information suppression, thwart recruiting efforts, disinformation, making faux concessions, divisive disruption, and censorship.

Applying *manipulation tactics* does not cause direct movement destruction but creates conditions when even existing movements do not pose a significant threat to the authority. Facilitating one fraction of the movement and neglecting others, coopting the movement into government's activities, depleting resources, and suppressing information flow, or creating a decision dilemma for the movement's members may disrupt its unity and undermine external or internal support [(Tarrow, 1989) (Porta, 2006) (Nelson, 2012)].

Soft repression can be described as tactics that undermine movement cohesion through counter-framing and propaganda. While civil resistance movements try to popularise their ideas and create a positive image to gain the support of internal and external audiences, authorities may use soft repression tactics to silence or extirpate the movement's ideas. Such an unconventional approach erodes the movement's ability to maintain momentum and attract new members (Ferree, 2005). This constellation produces a chain reaction of negative consequences, which may lead to the slow destruction of the movement. Media and information flow play a crucial role in applying soft repression. Modern technologies like the internet and social media provide a unique opportunity for broad communication within the movement and to external audiences. However, in repressing the opposition, government may possess effective counter-technologies as well. (Gohdes, 2020)

Another commonly employed soft repression tactic is arranged counterprotests - the mobilisation of the regime's own supporters, often achieved by incentivising

loyalists to participate in patriotic parades, establish encampments, or join pro-government marches. (Spector, 2006) Some autocratic regimes may also establish government-owned NGOs (GONGOs) to amplify and bolster the regime's propaganda efforts (Hellmeier, et al., 2019). For instance, in Russia, different pro-government youth organisations like *Nashi* are established to redirect the potential movement's participants and create a picture of government support for media purposes.

Hegemony is considered the most advantageous type of repression. In such a situation, few people even consider challenging authorities and elites in highly effective hegemonic regimes. As a result, there is little resistance mobilisation and minimal possibility of backfiring. According to Lee A. Smithey and Lester R. Kurtz, hegemony methods include:

- Planting cultural ideas, values and norms to uphold the existing order.
- Establishment of a spontaneous consensus between political agendas and ingrained collective identities based on nationalism, external threats, religious values, or economic incentives.
- Strengthening control over the population's consciousness through self-censorship.
- The creation of an effect of popular acclamation for any regime decisions through election fraud.

The concept of smart repression, which includes subtle and hegemonic strategies, adds further complexity to the task of civil resistance. While there is no definitive proof that the countermeasures of regimes in Russia, Belarus, or Kazakhstan were explicitly crafted under this concept, it offers a comprehensive framework for examining each country's approach to thwarting colour revolutions and preventing regime change.

A brief history of post-Communist civil resistance and civil resistance actions in the TOT of Ukraine

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nations across Eastern Europe and Central Asia reclaimed their independence. Nonetheless, remnants of the post-Communist system continued to shape their political trajectories. Rather than

seamlessly transitioning to democracy, many of these countries navigated what scholars term hybrid regimes, leaning towards autocracy. Despite this, a series of political upheavals sparked by allegations of electoral fraud in national elections since 2000 have hinted at potential democratic advancements. These events include the 'Bulldozer Revolution' in Serbia (2000), the 'Rose Revolution' in Georgia (2003), the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine (December 2004), and the 'Tulip Revolution' in Kyrgyzstan (early 2005).

The 'Bulldozer Revolution' refers to the events in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after the general election in September 2000, which culminated in the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic's government on October 5th, 2000. The leading role belongs to the nonviolent opposition group called *Otpor*, formed in 1998 and consisting mainly of the students. Initially, they started by organising symbolic marches from Belgrade to the city of Novi Sad to engage the rural provinces in their cause. From the outset, members were strictly committed to nonviolent resistance. *Otpor* maintained a singular primary objective: the removal of Milosevic from power. Secondary goals encompassed ensuring free and fair elections, unfettered access to education, and establishing free and independent media.

To increase their capabilities, they received external funding from the National Democratic Institute and Center for Civic Initiatives, which distributed copies of Gene Sharp's *From Dictatorship to Democracy* among the organisation's members. The International Republican Institute trained 400 *Otpor* activists in nonviolent resistance, while *Otpor* itself disseminated a training manual based on Sharp's *Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Initially, *Otpor*'s tactics were focused on informational activities, largely symbolic and infused with humour to undermine Milošević's image within the population. For the 2000 elections, they launched two significant propaganda campaigns. The first campaign, featuring stickers, t-shirts, and posters bearing the slogan 'He's Finished' (*Gotov Je*!), aimed to dispel the myth of Milošević's invincibility and discourage support for the incumbent. The second campaign, using the phrase 'It's Time', sought to mobilise a large voter turnout.

In response to contested election results, opposition leaders called for mass protests. Two hundred thousand people attended demonstrations in Belgrade, while similar gatherings took place in other major cities where opposition politicians had won municipal elections. Concurrently, *Otpor* leaders negotiated with police groups, ensuring that they would not use force against the protesters. Through their steadfast commitment to nonviolent resistance, *Otpor* successfully toppled Milošević's regime, creating the conditions for fair parliamentary elections and a more independent media (Rennebohm, 2011).

The Rose Revolution in Georgia aimed at the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze, who was widely viewed as a corrupt pawn of the Soviet Union. Despite Shevardnadze having claimed victory in the parliamentary elections of early November 2003, external observers reported numerous allegations of election fraud. Opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili asserted his party's victory, which independent observers supported.

Saakashvili rallied Georgians to peacefully protest Shevardnadze's regime. Demonstrations erupted nationwide, demanding new elections and Shevardnadze's resignation. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) played a pivotal role in orchestrating the protests, aided by significant donations from US billionaire George Soros. On 4 November, citizens staged large-scale rallies denouncing the election outcome, joined by various opposition factions. The largest protest on 14 November saw 20,000 to 30,000 people chanting and dancing around the presidential premises. Despite occasional clashes with military forces, protesters responded with gestures of peace, offering roses or kisses to soldiers. Even segments of the elite military began defecting from the regime.

The climax came on 24 November when protesters stormed a parliamentary session, brandishing red roses. The incident spurred Russian politicians to mediate talks between Shevardnadze's regime and the opposition. Subsequently, Shevardnadze announced his resignation. In the ensuing weeks, Saakashvili's party secured victory in both presidential and parliamentary elections (Weeks, 2008).

The Orange Revolution unfolded in Ukraine in November 2004 amidst allegations of fraudulent presidential elections. Viktor Yushchenko, the pro-Western

opposition candidate, faced off against Viktor Yanukovych, the pro-Russian Prime Minister. Despite official results declaring Yanukovych the winner by 3 percent, exit polls showed Yushchenko leading by 11 percent, sparking accusations of election fraud. Yushchenko's supporters took to the streets in massive protests, gathering in Kyiv's Maidan Square. Wearing orange — the colour of Yushchenko's campaign – demonstrators marched towards the parliament building. Similar protests erupted in other cities across Ukraine. Although Prime Minister Yanukovych's supporters staged demonstrations, especially in the south and east, they were vastly outnumbered by the pro-Yushchenko demonstrators.

Remarkably, despite the confrontational atmosphere and the sheer scale of the protests, the pro-Yushchenko campaigners remained resolutely nonviolent, abiding by the teachings of Gene Sharp and influenced by previous nonviolent revolutions such as the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia (2000) and the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003). The mass demonstrations in Kyiv continued to grow, with nearly a million people participating, including demonstrators travelling outside the capital to join the protests. Campaigners commandeered public buildings, offered private homes for lodging, and established communal kitchens to accommodate the influx of demonstrators from across the country. Protestors occupied the Maidan around the clock, erecting tents to sustain the spirit of protest day and night. In a gesture of goodwill, demonstrators offered flowers to the soldiers surrounding the Maidan and entertained them with music.

After two weeks of demonstrations, the parliament passed a vote of no confidence in Yanukovych's government, followed by the Supreme Court invalidating the election results. A new runoff election was scheduled, resulting in a victory for Yushchenko (Rennebohm, 2011).

The Tulip Revolution was a revolution in Kyrgyzstan in February-March 2005. The reason for the revolution was the parliamentary elections, which were accompanied by numerous violations. The opposition to the incumbent President, Askar Akayev, formed the Coordinating Council of People's Unity, led by Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Following the elections on 27 February, opposition factions released statements and

initiated protest rallies in various regions beyond the capital, Bishkek. Their demands included the annulment of the election outcomes and the resignation of Ayakev.

During these initial protests, the government used violence to suppress gatherings, arrested leaders, and censored independent newspapers and radio stations in order to control the coverage of the elections. In turn, protests backfired, and the opposition managed to seize power in the second-largest city in Kyrgyzstan, Osh. Over the next few days, the Coordinating Council of People's Unity extended its power to practically the entire southern region of the country. Mass protests also began in the capital city of Bishkek. Eventually, after seizing the main administrative buildings of the capital and completely taking control, the opposition forced Askar Akayev to resign, who fled to Moscow. Later, the parliament appointed opposition members to key positions such as prime minister, speaker, and others (Europe, 2007).

In all four cases of the revolutions, mass involvement in nonviolent actions was paramount for success. According to the 'Global Nonviolent Action Database', the most common feature for the mentioned case studies regarding nonviolent resistance was the 'assemblies of protest or support'. Depending on the events and circumstances, grassroots members of the population joined anti-regime protests in the capitals and other cities of the counties. Also, people resorted to the nonviolent occupation of iconic places like city squares and governmental buildings and were involved in disseminating slogans, caricatures, and symbols of the revolution, as well as imposing moral pressure on the governmental forces. The writings of Gene Sharp influenced Serbia's revolution, which began the wave of the 'Colour Revolutions'. At the same time, additionally to the influence of Serbia's events, every next revolution (Georgia in 2003, then Ukraine in 2004 and then Kyrgyzstan in 2005) was influenced by the success and experience of their predecessor [(Rennebohm, 2011), (Weeks, 2008), (Rennebohm, 2011), (Rennebohm, 2011)].

After Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukrainian society resorted to fierce resistance against Russian forces. Multiple protests occurred in Kherson, Melitopol, Enerhodar, and other southern cities that were

considered by Russians to be regions with pro-Russian sentiments. Trying to evaluate how the nonviolent civil resistance has contributed to stopping the invasion, Felip Daza Sierra analysed 235 nonviolent actions in Ukraine that happened between February 24 and June 30, 2022. (Daza, 2022) The most numerous were the actions of expressions. In the southern regions, people gathered in rallies to sing the Ukrainian anthem, display symbols like the Ukrainian flag, and wear national costumes. In the northern areas, people physically blocked the movements of Russian military convoys to impede troop advancements toward Kyiv. Additionally, civilians provided the Armed Forces of Ukraine with intelligence information to enhance the defence operations of Ukrainian troops.

When Russians increased repressions in the TOT, public protest actions shifted to clandestine activities and non-cooperation actions. Posters and leaflets promoting disobedience against the occupation began to appear. People refused to cooperate with the occupational administrations and obtain Russian passports. These covert actions were intended to convey that the resistance remained active, to maintain high morale, and to minimise the danger for the activists. There is no precise data on how the Ukrainian resistance was effective. Still, Felip Daza Sierra argues that it prevented Russia from achieving certain military and political objectives that were part of the long-term plans of the Russian government, including the establishment of a permanent military presence in the occupied territories and weakening the legal justification used by Russia to argue for the 'liberation' of the Ukrainian people. It also played an essential role in maintaining the morale and the sense of national unity among the population, contributing to Ukrainian Armed Forces mobilisation and social support. (Daza, 2022)

The reaction of post-Soviet leadership to the outcomes of Colour Revolutions

Revolutionary regime changes in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan were of significant concern for the ruling elites of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The first hint of particular irritation that events in Ukraine provoked in the Kremlin was expressed by Vladimir Putin during the Orange Revolution on 6 December 2004,

when at a press conference in Ankara he made one of his first anti-Western statements: 'You know what particularly worries me about the situation unfolding in Ukraine? ... I don't want us, like in Germany, to divide Europe into East and West, into people of the first and second category, first and second grade… And if the ungrateful native objects, he will be punished with the help of a bomb, a rocket cudgel, as it was in Belgrade' (Silaev, 2005). In May 2005, Vladislav Surkov, a member of the Presidential Administration and believed to be a key ideologue for Putin, introduced his notable concept of *sovereign democracy* during a semi-official address in Moscow to the general council of the Business Russia association. According to Thomas Ambrosio, Surkov's speech was a reaction to the events in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004). His mention of the 'Orange Revolution' indicated the Kremlin's apprehension that the downfall of authoritarian regimes, with possible Western assistance or guidance, might extend beyond Georgia and Ukraine to other post-Soviet nations. Concerns about external criticism potentially weakening Russian leadership and opening the door to external control were partly fueled by perceptions of Western involvement in the 'Orange Revolution'. The notion that the West might seek to replicate its supposed past successes in Russia by undermining the Kremlin's legitimacy and inciting popular uprisings gained traction in Russian political circles after Ukrainian mass civil resistance (Ambrosio, 2007).

In addition, prominent hardliners in Russia accused the West of interfering in the situation in Ukraine. For example, the leader of the Communist Party of Russia, Gennady Zyuganov, said that he 'personally see that numerous actions of the local opposition bear the imprints of those groups that at different times tried to destabilise Prague, Budapest and Bucharest - the mark of the US intelligence services' (Zyuganov, 2004).

Russian officials also commented on the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, labelling the events as sparked by Western countries to change the pro-Russian political regime in the country. For instance, State Duma Deputy Anton Bakov warned the USA that 'neither the 'orange' nor the 'tulip' revolution will take place in Russia' (Kommersant, 2005).

After the 'Orange Revolution', Putin's regime began to persecute active representatives of civil society and 'foreign agents'. Vladyslav Surkov created the patriotic pro-Putin youth organisation *Nashi*. It was headed by Vasyl Yakemenko, a former employee of the administration of the President of the Russian Federation. Surkov reiterated that one of the functions of the organisation is to prevent the Ukrainian scenario in Russia (Dickinson, 2017).

Belarusian officials also criticised the events in Georgian and Ukraine as a Western-lead coups to bring more amicable political regimes to power in those countries. Alexander Lukashenko insisted that the 2004 events in Ukraine were a clear attempt by Western forces to destabilise the region. He declared that Belarusian authorities would not allow such attempts in the country: 'We categorically do not accept the scenario of 'democratic change' of political elites, that the West does not like. These are not colour revolutions - they are banditry under the guise of democracy' (Lukashenko, 2005). Allegedly, the events in Ukraine and further in Kyrgyzstan prompted Lukashenko's opinion that a strong state leader is the key to success in preventing colour revolution scenarios in Belarus, pushing him towards more preventive measures. For instance, commenting on events in Kyrgyzstan, he stated that the reason for the Tulip revolution was the weakness of state power and the collapse of the economy, which negatively affected the standard of living (Kommersant, 2005).

Viktor Sheiman, Head of the Administration of the President of Belarus, stated that Belarus would closely monitor the situation in Ukraine and any attempts to undermine stability will receive a quick and decisive response: 'We are strengthening our security forces and are ready to face any threats, both external and internal'. (Sheiman, 2004)

In turn, Head of the House of Representatives Volodymyr Konopliov shared the opinion that Belarus should count on Moscow's support in preventing orange revolutions: 'The topic of the Orange Revolutions is not relevant for Belarus… But we know that our Russian friends will support us'. (Konopliov, 2005).

In 2004, under President Nursultan Nazarbayev's leadership, Kazakhstan observed the Orange Revolution events in Ukraine with cautious attention. Political leadership refrained from commenting on events in Ukraine due to its significant economic and political connections with both Russia and Ukraine.

At the same time, Kazakh political opposition representatives were interested in nonviolent resistance tactics applied during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. They visited Kyiv to study the methods used by Yushchenko's supporters amid preparation for future Presidential elections in Kazakhstan. Opposition leader Tolen Tokhtasynov highlighted, 'If our [Kazakh] authorities step on the same rake, using falsifications and administrative resources, the people will take to the streets… The ideas of the revolution of roses and chestnuts are beginning to penetrate into Kazakhstan' (Melnykevych, 2004). Hence, Kazakh leadership allegedly apprehended the possible proliferation of destabilising colour revolutions in the region while also aiming to maintain a balanced stance.

The statements above illustrate how the political leadership of certain nations construed colour revolutions as orchestrated by the West, aiming to shift the political leadership in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan from pro-Russian to more democratic orientations. The inability of the leaders in these countries to manage and stabilise the situations purportedly emboldened figures like Putin, Lukashenko, and Nazarbayev to develop their own strategies to prevent and suppress events when organised civil resistance will endanger the survival of their regimes.

Anti-opposition measures in Russia

The Russian repressive strategy entailed **intimidation, manipulation,** and **soft repression** methods to suppress democratic NGOs and intimidate real political opposition while selectively facilitating puppet ones. During the 2006 campaign for the Moscow City Duma elections, during which *Rodina* was expected to strengthen its role as the leading opposition party, its candidates were disqualified by a court due to a racially offensive election advertisement. Fear was multiplied by a series of violent attacks on *Rodina*'s party members and their children without clear explanation. This mounting pressure caused several deputies with business interests to leave the party in an attempt to avoid the Kremlin's anger (Rudneva, et al., 2006).

The dismantling of *Rodina* served as a model for suppressing the liberal parties, which were already pushed to the outskirts of Russia's limited public space. Two years later, *Yabloko* and the Union of Right Forces were excluded from several contests during the regional elections in March 2007. When the 2007-2008 election cycle arrived, neither party was sufficiently positioned to oppose the Kremlin's strategy for selecting Putin's chosen successor as president.

Probably the best example of a coopted opposition is the acting leader of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov. Putin leverages both his security apparatus and the situation in Chechnya to maintain control over the conflict, while Moscow has allocated financial assistance to cover approximately 81 per cent of the budget for the Chechen Republic (Kowal, 2023).

During the Putin era, a long list of assassinated high-profile Russian politicians, human rights activists, and journalists has grown. The most famous among these names were Boris Nemtsov (assassinated in 2015) and the leader of the 'Russia of the Future' Alexei Navalny (imprisoned in February 2021 and died in prison in 2023) (Bushuev, 2020).

As the development of NGOs and their active participation in social and political life posed a great concern for Putin's regime, it was quite predictable that Russian authorities would try to eliminate this threat. Since 2006, 'the Russian undesirable organisations law' (officially Federal Law of 23.05.2015 N 129-FZ 'On amendments of some legislative acts of the Russian Federation') obligated NGOs to undergo a compulsory registration procedure, with notably expansive criteria that could be used for the potential denial of registration. Specifically, foreign NGOs could be prohibited if they were perceived to pose a threat to Russia's sovereignty, political independence, national cohesion, distinctiveness, cultural heritage, or national interests (Horvath, 2011).

In addition, after the 2012 events in Bolotnaya Square, it became clear to the regime that intimidating anti-NGO measures applied since 2006 were not enough. To erode the NGO's popularity among the population and ability to attract new members, the concept of a 'foreign agent' was introduced into Federal legislation in

2012. It produced a chain reaction of negative consequences, which led to the erosion of NGO networks (Gretskiy, 2023).

According to the Law 'On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent', any entities and individuals that receive 'external support' or are 'influenced from abroad' are obligated to register as foreign agents and disclose this status. Upon registration, they become subject to increased scrutiny through additional audits and must label all their publications with a 24-word disclaimer indicating their status as a foreign agent (Federation, 2022). Starting from 2017, this stigma extended to include media outlets, and as of 2021, it also encompassed individuals. In 2020, a legal framework for criminal proceedings was established for any perceived.

Conversely, Putin's regime developed a network of government-led NGOs (GONGOs) with financial, administrative, and informational support. For Gleb Pavlovskii, allegedly a mastermind of the Putin regime's response to the velvet revolution, the most important consideration to avoid was a passive, defensive posture. The sole method to prevent a revolutionary scenario was for the government to initiate a dialogue with the society and galvanise its supporters within the broader population. At the core of the Putin regime's counter-revolutionary strategy was the youth organisation *Nashi*. It was designed to counterbalance the pro-democratic youth movements that had played a leading role in the Serbian (2000), Georgian (2003), and Ukrainian (2004) events. Aleksandr Gorodetskii, a leading activist of *Nashi*, described the main goal of the organisation as 'not to allow Orange revolution in Russia' (Horvath, 2011).

Later, there was the emergence of a 'military-patriotic movement' targeting youths aged 11 to 18, known as *Yunarmiya* or 'Youth Army'. This initiative was spearheaded by former Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and received endorsement from Putin, with sponsorship from four state-owned banks. Its membership grew exponentially, from 100 participants in 2016 to over 30,000 a year later. *Yunarmiya* gained significant prominence when it played a central role in the Kremlin's annual World War II Victory Day parade in May 2017, occurring just weeks after a

substantial number of Russian youths had participated in anti-corruption protests organised by the opposition across the nation (Kudryavtsev, 2017).

The Kremlin has consistently employed **disinformation** and **propaganda** as key tactics to manipulate its population. For years, propaganda within Russia has regularly criticised the Western democratic model in contrast to the Russian system. However, under Putin's leadership, the Kremlin's use of disinformation and propaganda has not only aimed to control internal narratives but also to stoke fears and cultivate fervent support for its policies and actions. In public statements, Kremlin strategists often framed revolutionary threats as Western conspiracies, asserting that Colour Revolutions were funded, trained, and coordinated by Western entities. Substantial resources were dedicated to spreading this conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theories played a major role in *Edinaya Rossiya*'s election campaigning since 2007. Putin, in one of his speeches, accused Yeltsin-era officials of seeking a return to power and those collaborating with foreign embassies of being jackals who relied on foreign support. He claimed they were influenced by Western experts and trained in neighbouring countries (Glikin, 2007).

Police units played a vital role in **violent** and **nonviolent tactics**. Their actions were aligned with intimidation and manipulation tactics to prevent dissent and maintain loyalty among unit members.

Hegemony tactics were utilised to provide an alternative reality for society. As a former officer of the KGB, an authority primarily responsible for suppressing religious activities in the USSR, Putin has close relations with the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church. It reflects Putin's perception of the vital importance of cultivating his image as a 'man of faith' and a 'defender of Orthodox values'. Both of Putin's images have been systematically employed as a means of internal ideology and international influence (Shuster, 2016).

The Kremlin's strengthening of its relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church intensified after the large-scale protests in 2011-2012. Patriarch Kirill, who assumed leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2009, endorsed Putin's lengthy rule as a 'miracle of God', praised Putin for rectifying Russia's tumultuous democratic

transition in the 1990s, and criticised Putin's opponents as materialistic and a threat to Russia (Sampson, 2018).

Election fraud enabled Putin to seize power and foster public approval of the regime's decisions. Greg Yudin argues that elections in Russia often serve as a form of endorsing the existing leadership. It means that Russians perceive elections not primarily as a way to select their nation's leadership but as a validation of the ruler's decisions. Moreover, the more confidence leaders demonstrate, the more public endorsement they receive (Yudin, 2022).

An overview of Russian repressive tactics according to 'smart repression' reveals that the Russian government has been focused on establishing a hegemonic authoritarian rule, giving significant attention to each tactic, from violence to hegemony.

Anti-opposition measures in Belarus

At the beginning of his rule, Alexander Lukashenko relied mostly on **manipulation** and **soft repression** tactics to hinder the growth of civil society. Independent media and NGOs were the main targets for his repressive measures. The government systematically dismantled independent media and NGOs through means such as exploiting libel laws, detaining those distributing opposition papers, and exorbitant tax rates. Curtailing foreign funding through labyrinthine bureaucratic processes to align financial activities with the law, and ceaseless tax inspections prompted foreign grant donors to distance themselves from Belarus, fulfilling Lukashenko's intentions (Lenzi, 2002).

Like Russia, Belarus utilised the tactic of **arranged counterprotests** to create a picture of social support by establishing quasi-NGOs in collaboration with various government ministries and committees (Lenzi, 2002). Thus, the establishment of youth organisations like the Belarusian Patriotic Union of Youth (BPSM) with chapters in every regional higher educational establishment was aimed on instilling pro-regime propaganda in young individuals and deter their engagement in opposition politics (Human Rights, 1998). To support this endeavour, BPSM

members were granted privileges and received discounts both on campus and in numerous stores nationwide.

However, as Lukashenko's control over the political apparatus and judicial system in Belarus became stronger, the government shifted to more hard and **violent** tactics, brutally suppressing any dissent with violent police actions and **intimidation**. Any unsanctioned mass demonstrations were prevented by imposing restrictions with high negative consequences for those who violated them. Before the 2001 elections, Lukashenko signed a decree that prohibited demonstrations by unregistered organisations, imposing a limit of one thousand participants for any demonstration and explicitly forbidding the use of masks (U.S. Department of State, 2002).

Following the events of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and in anticipation of the presidential election in July 2006, Lukashenko started to use police forces to actively disperse civil demonstrations. The legal framework and its practical application in Belarus forbade any impromptu assembly of citizens. Hence, all protests in Belarus were categorised as 'unlawful mass gatherings', which allowed security forces to disperse and detain protesters in a violent manner (Silitski, 2005).

To justify the extensive violence of security forces and morally support the personnel, Belarusian authorities and Alexandr Lukashenko personally and constantly emphasised that citizens participated in 'illegal mass events', describing them as a threat to national security. All of those measures and many years of selective support to security personnel made loyalty shift among security forces almost impossible. Additionally, during the post-election protests in Belarus in August 2020, Lukashenko consistently appeared at the head of the rows of security forces, thereby visibly showing his support and increasing their morale.

To prevent the population from discontent, Lukashenko successfully instrumentalised economic benefits and punishments. Buzgalin and Kolganov (Buzgalin, et al., 2021) argue that Belarus exhibits a strong state capacity to deliver public goods to its citizens. Lukashenko strategically employs this capacity to ensure citizen contentment and compliance with his governance.

In addition, to prevent any possibility of dissent in society, Belarus's leader completely focused on developing comprehensive relations with the Russian Federation in all domains. Nechyparenka (Nechyparenka, 2011) argues that the relationship between Russia and Belarus posed a significant barrier to political regime change in Belarus and hindered the expansion of democracy to the east as it reinforces people's memories of the glorious and prosperous past of Belarus as a part of the Soviet Union.

The analysis of the various tactics identified above shows that Alexander Lukashenko, as the Belarusian president, focused on the establishment of hegemonic authoritarian rule in the country by destroying democratic entities (free media and NGOs) and substituting them with governmental-led ones and providing economic incentives to the population for their continued support. Violent tactics and intimidation were aimed at maintaining control and preventing the population from participating in undesired actions.

Anti-opposition measures in Kazakhstan

Under the leadership of Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan underwent three decades of authoritarian rule marked by significant political control. His approach to political opposition co-optation and orchestration of economic incentives for the populace has played a pivotal role in his enduring tenure.

In general, Nazarbayev usually preferred to coopt regime challengers by offering them certain positions, creating government policies to promote certain persons or pressuring them to join the presidential political party *Nur Otan*, artificially bolstering support for the regime (Cummings, 2005). Also, the government provides financial support to chosen local media to favour media affiliated with Nazarbayev's family or loyal supporters while simultaneously instrumentalising the law, through libel suits and court cases, against journalists who criticise the regime (Aaronson, 2017).

Kazakhstani workers who protested against unsafe working conditions, unpaid wages, and low pay faced severe repression from government officials. In turn, the government **selectively facilitated** worker unions with ties to the state. In 2014, a

new trade union law mandated that all trade unions affiliate with government-backed unions in higher tiers by July 2015 or they would lose their registration and be considered illegal. As a result, the number of registered unions dropped from 896 in June 2015 to just 163 by the end of July 2015 (U.S. Department of State, 2015).

To demobilise dissent, the Kazakhstan government used **legal intimidation**, making it difficult for individuals to protest. They must register these demonstrations with the local mayor's office at least ten days before the intended date of the protest. In reality, the mayor's office usually extends the review period or limits when and where citizens can hold their protests, typically permitting protests only in the city's outskirts. In turn, protest organisers and participants who proceed without government permission face potential penalties, including fines, detention lasting up to 15 days, or even prison sentences of up to one year (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Moreover, engagement in 'unauthorised protests' was consistently utilised to portray protesters as national security risks, fostering negative sentiments toward them within the general population and removing any doubts from the law enforcement personnel who would be executing the dispersals. Trying to frame the perception of protestors as bandits and criminals, and disband oil workers' protests in Zhanaozen in 2011, Kazakhstan security services allegedly utilised criminal elements to infiltrate the protestors' camp. Once the alleged provocateurs started to conduct violent actions against police personnel, predeployed OMON police units resorted to violent tactics to dismantle the protestors' camp on the city square (Ageleuov, 2020).

Kazakhstani authorities always used **media manipulation** to counter-frame the protestors' narrative and portray them as a threat. While the Constitution assures the right to assemble, the 'Law on National Security' has frequently been employed to classify protests and demonstrations as a threat to national security, sometimes insisting on their ties with foreign actors (Lillis, 2022).

Violent tactics were frequently used in critical or pre-emptive situations alongside **intimidation, manipulation,** and **soft repression**. Typically, when the situation in Kazakhstan had developed in a way that it is considered a threat to a ruling regime, law enforcement units have consistently employed excessive and even deadly force with the immediate goal of dispersing civil movements, instilling fear, as well as humiliating and punishing their participants.

The **hegemonic** tactics of the Kazakhstan government entailed election fraud and cultivated spontaneous consensus among citizens who relied on government-provided financial benefits. Marlene Laruelle argues that 'the elections in Kazakhstan are organised to be a confirmation vote for the president' (Laruelle, 2015). In turn, Masaaki Higashijima argues that Nazarbayev successfully mobilised his supporters through extensive economic distribution, consistently providing tangible benefits to the citizens. (Higashijima, 2022 p. 206) Sally N Cummings highlights that Nazarbaev translated resources and wealth from swift development driven by oil into agenda-setting power, providing the population with the narrative that ruling authority should not be threatened as it would undermine the well-being of the people (Cummings, 2005).

Russian suppression measures in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine

Russia has employed a comprehensive array of measures to control the population of the TOT of Ukraine to force the population there to collaborate. The FSB's strategic planning did not foresee that the majority would welcome Russian presence. Drawing from its past experience in Chechnya, the planning assumption was that a collaboration rate of approximately 8 percent of the population was necessary for the counterintelligence regime to operate effectively. Hence, Russia relied heavily on violence to force the population to collaborate and intimidate them against voicing any pro-Ukrainian sentiments (Watling, et al., 2023).

The level of violence was contingent on the perceived threat of pro-Ukrainian sentiments or anti-Russian attitudes in the particular region. In a conceptual framework, the violent measures employed by Russian occupation forces included

unlawful or arbitrary killings, abduction and disappearance, torture, inhumane treatment, and unjust detention (Bureau of Democracy, 2022). Additionally, violence was a primary tool to enhance intimidation. There was a constant threat of the application of violence to the persons who spread pro-Ukrainian sentiments or opposed collaboration with the Russian occupants. Also, another facet of the campaign was aimed at intimidation, and the suppression of dissent involved the application of collective punishment. **Surveillance** was the main method to scare the locals and prevent them from any possibility of countering the occupation regime. Persons suspected of having ties with the Ukrainian state were detained and processed through filtration measures that were accompanied by interrogation and torture.

Violence and coercion were the focus of Russian occupation efforts to promote **co-optation**. Prominent community figures, including those responsible for overseeing public utilities, educational institutions, and factories, were frequently summoned to meetings with FSB operatives and given a choice: either collaborate by continuing their responsibilities under the FSB's supervision or resign. Russian personnel frequently filled the positions of those who resigned when no collaborators could be identified or if doubts arose regarding a potential collaborator's loyalty (Watling, et al., 2023 p. 22).

Another pillar of local coercion to collaboration was **resource depletion**. Persons without Russian passports were deprived of medical treatment. The occupiers also demanded a Russian passport for the renewal of electricity contracts and vehicle registration. Generally, if persons refuse to receive a Russian passport, they will be deprived of the opportunity to satisfy basic needs (National Resistance Center of Ukraine, 2023 p. 21).

The occupation administrations employed a strategy of **information suppression** with further imposing of **censorship** and **disinformation.** Any inbound information flow was disrupted by seizure and establishing control over the information infrastructure (TV and radio towers, telecommunication, and internet

equipment). Thus, only pro-Russian occupation messages could be presented in the information domain of TOT. (Watling, et al., 2023 p. 23)

Selective facilitation was applied regarding religious issues. The occupiers pressured religious representatives from various denominations other than the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Also, a substantial array of public organisations were deployed to engage to ideologically and actively **oppose** pro-Ukrainian organisations. Notable among these groups are the 'Movement of the First', 'Young Guard', *Yug molody*, *Yunarmiya*, and DOSAAF. They curate and oversee a spectrum of events, invite influential figures from Russia, and coordinate youth-oriented sojourns, all of which contribute to shaping the convictions of younger demographics (National Resistance Center of Ukraine, 2023 p. 22).

Reaching hegemony within the TOT was supported by violent counterintelligence and disinformation measures and is questionable, as the primary reason why locals do not challenge the regime is an environment of constant fear. Nevertheless, Russia focused on **pseudo-referendums**, election fraud, and reaching **spontaneous consensus** with locals based on the controlled distribution of basic necessities. The primary aim of such a hegemony is to create an image of legitimacy and the population's acclamation of the occupation.

An analysis of the repressive strategies implemented by Russia within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine reveals a pronounced dependence on the use of **violence** as a means to enforce a counterintelligence regime and secure compliance from the local population.

Comparison of repressive strategies in Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan

Analysed cases of Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan reveal the general tendency of their regimes to utilise all available means to suppress political opposition and social dissent. At the same time, each regime has its own approach to the implementation of repressive strategies, described according to the smart repression continuum.

First, Russia, as the most hegemonic authoritarian regime, deliberately crafted its repressive mechanism for preventing counter-revolution, meticulously considering

every tactic, ranging from the use of violence to the establishment of hegemony. The central element of this strategy involves repressing democratic NGOs and political opposition while simultaneously creating government-controlled NGOs and promoting hegemony based on Orthodox values and manipulated elections.

Second, Belarus ruler Alexand Lukashenko initially focused mostly on suppressing political opposition and NGOs and the establishment of media control by the employment of manipulation and soft repression. Once those objectives were reached, he sustained his ruling regime by violent measures, economic incentives and election fraud.

Third, the core of Nazarbayev's strategy revolves around a twofold approach: intimidating entities such as worker unions, journalists, and political elites who are seen as challengers to the regime while concurrently co-opting political opposition and selectively providing support to pro-government labour unions.

At the same time, all cases have the following commonalities:

- Intimidation, manipulation and soft repression tactics targeted such entities as democratic NGOs, opposition political parties, worker unions, and youth organisations as they were considered vital for the development of the society.
- Control over the information domain was crucial for the regimes to disseminate their narratives. Hence, freedom of media in all cases was targeted by intimidation and manipulation.
- Regimes framed the image of the demonstrators as unlawful, unsanctioned, western-led riots, and a threat to national security, to prevent a backfiring effect and loyalty shift due to the application of violence.
- Law enforcement and special services were instrumental in employing violence and intimidation when the situation required it. Their activities were reinforced by manipulation to prevent dissent and maintain loyalty within their ranks.

In turn, repressive measures of Russia in the TOT of Ukraine were the continuation of repressive measures that proved their domestic effectiveness. They consisted of all available means to suppress dissent among the local populace and co-opt regional

leaders with further enforcement to collaboration and establishment of an occupational regime. The main difference from the domestic application is that the TOT repressive strategy heavily relied on the application of violence and intimidation to those who were suspected of having pro-Ukrainian sentiments. Other means, such as manipulation, soft repression, and hegemony, are used exclusively to create a picture of the occupational authority's legitimacy.

Conclusions and recommendations

Post-USSR totalitarian regimes are successfully adapted to the challenges posed by nonviolent resistance movements. Those countries likely have thoroughly examined the lessons learned from the previous velvet or colour revolutions. Upon assuming power, Putin, Lukashenko and Nazarbayev prioritised the elimination of its nearest threats, employing a dual strategy of suppressing and co-opting political opposition through intimidation and manipulation while concurrently asserting control over the nation's media landscape. Once political dominance was firmly established, repressive measures were redirected toward civil society in order to preempt scenarios akin to velvet or colour revolutions, which were perceived as the principal existential threat to the ruling regimes.

Recognising that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil institutions played a pivotal role in fostering the democratic development of civil society, these entities became the focus of targeted efforts involving intimidation, manipulation, and soft repression. The relatively underdeveloped state of civil society in post-USSR countries afforded the ruling regimes a considerable advantage, as they harnessed previously consolidated political, judicial, and economic power to effectively employ a spectrum of repressive measures. Hegemonic strategies are continually employed to amplify the aforementioned measures, ensuring the perpetuation and legitimacy of these regimes. Conversely, violent methods were employed as a contingency plan when the situation deteriorated. However, the effective implementation of the previously discussed tactics enabled regimes to manage loyalty shifts and mitigate the backfiring.

Noteworthy, the repressive measures of Russia in the TOT of Ukraine were a continuation of repressive measures that had proved effective in a domestic context.

The main difference from the domestic application is that the TOT repressive strategy heavily relies on violence and intimidation. Other means like manipulation, soft repression, and hegemony are used exclusively to create a picture of the occupational authority's legitimacy.

Notwithstanding, nonviolent civil resistance could be considered a natural safeguard against the slide of countries to totalitarianism and preparedness in case of occupation. Educating the population about nonviolent civil resistance could be a powerful force multiplier in terms of preparing the country according to the total defence concept. However, events tied to the Russian occupation of Ukraine raise the following two points to be considered:

First, various forms of organisations, including NGOs, political parties, youth clubs, and worker unions may be seen as strategically predictable by a repressive or occupational authority, treating them as systems with calculated vulnerabilities and capabilities. Consequently, during civilian preparation for total defence, the main effort should be shifted from organisational to individual levels. Development and activities of the abovementioned bodies will be beneficial during peacetime, multiplying and supporting government efforts for resilience building. However, in the case of occupation, based on the Ukraine experience, all of them will be targeted by an occupational authority. At the same time, Ukraine's self-organised grassroots resistance without the participation of the government has been fundamental for undermining the Russian objectives during the full-scale invasion since February 2022. This approach was crucial as the oppressor could not pre-assess such individual responses of individuals nor their organisational abilities. Thus, government efforts to cultivate people's resilient and resistant state of mind on the individual level are paramount for successful resistance preparation.

Second, the repressive or occupational authority invariably seeks to attain informational dominance by stifling free media or enforcing censorship. Additionally, it endeavours to undermine the narrative of resistance and erode support for resistance movements. Contemporary communicative technologies offer unique opportunities for these movements to maintain lines of

communication and convey narratives both domestically and internationally. Nonetheless, to ensure credibility, it is imperative for resistance movements to pre-establish effective and trustworthy channels and methods of communication. Thus, governments should develop an appropriate communications strategy during the preparation of a resistance. Focus should be placed on credible sources for communication with domestic and international audiences. Persons or sources who will speak on behalf of the resistance should be known to the audience, and their legitimacy should be undoubted. However, security requirements will probably not allow real resistance members to be public due to the potential threat of elimination. In such a case, channels in social messengers or pages in social networks that do not directly link to real personalities can help solve this issue. Thus, to ensure credibility, developing credible sources of information regarding resistance, independent of the particular persons, is one of the main and challenging tasks for the government during the preparation phase to be solved.

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