

Are Color Revolutions a New Form of War?

By [Alexander Golts](#)

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A Soviet-era anecdote tells of a man who steals parts at his factory job in order to build the sewing machine he has promised his wife. He manages to smuggle the parts home without any problem, but every time he assembles them, he ends up building a Kalashnikov rifle instead. In the same way, the Defense Ministry seems to end up with its own "Kalashnikov" every time it tries to restore the international dialogue on security issues.

The most recent example occurred at the Moscow Conference on International Security, at which members of Russia's General Staff announced the appearance of a new form of warfare.

When the conference agenda was initially set, the plan was to focus on regional security, with an emphasis on the problems that would inevitably arise when international coalition forces withdrew from Afghanistan. Prior to the Ukrainian crisis, the most pressing problem was the need for Russia and the West to work together to ensure at least a degree of stability in Central Asia.

However, the Kremlin clearly issued orders that radically changed the focus of the forum. In his opening address before the conference, President Vladimir Putin emphasized that so-called "color revolutions," are now the main threat to peace.

Senior Defense Ministry officials developed that argument during their subsequent remarks. According to them, Western intelligence agencies conspire to foment "color revolutions" around the world.

It turns out that Moscow considers "color revolutions" a new type of warfare. In his speech before the conference, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said, "Color revolutions are increasingly taking on the form of warfare and are developed according to the rules of warcraft."

General Staff head Valery Gerasimov and Main Operations Directorate head Vladimir Zarudnitsky expanded further on that brilliant idea. In fact, it appears that the primary function of the General Staff is to translate the policies of senior leaders into the language of military concepts.

General Zarudnitsky did not disappoint: he painted a frightening picture of this new type of warfare, saying, "First, the countries organizing the overthrow of the undesirable government use their military potential to apply overt pressure, with the goal of preventing that state from using its security forces to restore law and order," Zarudnitsky said.

"Then, as the opposition launches military operations against government forces, the foreign states provide military and economic aid to the rebels. After that, the coalition of countries can carry out military operations to defeat the government forces and assist the armed opposition forces to seize power," Zarudnitsky added.

Interestingly, the Kremlin does not even consider the possibility that people living under authoritarian rule might simply get fed up with their leaders and rebel without outside provocation or assistance. According to Russia's generals, all popular uprisings are the result of foreign intervention — and yet they offered no evidence in support of that claim.

Otherwise, they would have had difficulty explaining why, for example, Washington would have schemed to overthrow former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, whose regime had been loyal to the U.S.

The general also made the curious argument that color revolutions are just another form of military action. He said, "It is impossible not to notice that all of the actions of the armed rebel groups, the tactical airstrikes and missile strikes using precision weapons were all highly organized, coordinated and linked in terms of their goals, objectives, timing and targets."

He conveniently overlooked the fact that Libya was the only case where Western countries conducted military operations in support of an armed opposition. And yet there is no evidence that Libya's armed opposition were commanded by Western military headquarters.

Moscow's main goal is to use smoke and mirrors to prove that color revolutions are really a form of disguised aggression that uses new technologies to destroy undesirable

governments and remove them from the political arena.

Russian officials tried to somehow force the situation in Ukraine to fit into their new construct. In so doing, they completely ignored the fact that the so-called "revolutionary" forces in Ukraine command that country's regular army, and that, according to the scenario spelled out by the head of the Main Operations Directorate, Russia played the role of the foreign government using its "military potential to apply overt pressure, with the goal of preventing that state from using its security forces to restore law and order" — in this case, by discouraging Kiev from using its army to deal with separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Unfortunately, the pronouncements at the conference were not just so much hot air. Even though they were only acting on orders from above, Russian generals effectively breathed life into Putin's paranoid fantasies.

After all, if "color revolutions" are really a new form of aggression, the General Staff must urgently develop a strategy for combating it. In this sense, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the actions of separatists in Ukraine's east and south can be seen as a sort of "color counter-revolution."

What is more, that approach paves the way for using military forces to combat internal threats because the Kremlin is convinced that the West is constantly looking for a way to organize a "color revolution" in Russia.

This sets up a chain of faulty conclusions in which Moscow interprets any protest against the authorities as an attempt to stage a color revolution — an act that is now defined as an act of aggression against the state. And by this logic, the government can mobilize not only the police and internal security forces to crack down on political protestors, but also the Army.

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