

# The Double Monopoly and Its Technologists

## The Russian Preemptive Counterrevolution

ALEXANDER ETKIND AND ANDREI SHCHERBAK

**Abstract:** Consolidating its power in Russia and post-Soviet space, the Russian administration strives for a double monopoly over natural resources and violence. To achieve these goals politically, the Kremlin cultivates a new parapolitical group of professionals that call themselves “political technologists.” In this article, the authors analyze this group’s changing methods and priorities with special reference to Russian responses to the Ukrainian Revolution of 2004.

**Keywords:** democracy, energy, political processes, Russia, Ukraine, violence

Ukraine’s Orange Revolution captivated Russian political elites’ attention like few other events in recent decades. A small segment of these elites welcomed the Orange’s victory, but a far larger portion cursed it. Neither side would deny, however, that these events have built a new frame of reference for Russian politics. Subsequent events, such as the 2006 “gas war,” which the Russian government unsuccessfully launched against Ukraine, added to ambivalent sentiments of hostility and dependency. Frightened by a pro-European revolution in a country that Russian elites historically called “Little Russia” and perceived as a backward, though culturally similar, colony since the eighteenth century, the Russian leadership revised and radicalized its policies. The Kremlin’s speeches and actions revealed that it desired two monopolies: control over energy and control over the application of violence.

The rhetorical shift from liberalism and modernization to the self-conscious reliance on this double monopoly became prominent only during Russian President Vladimir Putin’s second term. In his first term, Putin and his administration maintained a general interest in such issues as democracy, social capital, the knowledge economy, support of small businesses, competitiveness, and so on.<sup>1</sup> With energy revenue steadily rising, however, the Kremlin lost interest. The actual solidification of this new political stance emerged because of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. Russian leaders found themselves presiding over political processes determined by events beyond their control. In central and eastern European countries, peaceful revolutions in the late 1980s and the early 1990s were

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Alexander Etkind teaches Russian literature and cultural history at Cambridge University. He was professor at the European University at St. Petersburg until 2005. Andrei Shcherbak teaches political science at the European University at St. Petersburg. Copyright © 2008 Helioref Publications

not entirely autonomous. The political crises' domestic origins interacted with external models and pressures, which restricted national governments' ability to use force. When one country's revolution causes a chain reaction in other states with similar political regimes, scholars typically talk about "contagion," "the domino effect," or "the export of democracy."<sup>2</sup> Evidently, exporting and importing political regimes is easier when partners are geographically and culturally close. In eastern Europe, Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 secret speech caused the Hungarian Revolution. In 1989, Soviet *perestroika* led to the eastern European velvet revolutions. Communism's collapse in eastern Europe consequently influenced political struggles in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Later, the Soviet Union's disintegration served as the template used in the Balkans. The Serbian electoral revolution influenced similar processes in Georgia and Ukraine. The Georgian Rose Revolution's success was especially important for Ukraine. Currently, Russian political debate rarely goes without a reference—hostile, envious, or ambivalent—to the Orange Revolution.

### The Technologists' Democratic Decorations

In Russia and Ukraine, the ruling regimes consolidated their power while holding onto the functioning decorations of a democratic order. In Belarus and the Central Asian states, these decorations were considered irrelevant, allowing autocrats to gain a stronger grasp on power. As Scott Gates and his coauthors prove, institutionally inconsistent regimes (those exhibiting both democratic and autocratic institutional characteristics) have shorter life spans than democracies and autocracies.<sup>4</sup> Putin's uneasy compromise with democracy, which helped Russia establish its position as an international partner, demanded the state make serious but dramatically inconsistent investments. It produced a peculiar group of specialists from various backgrounds, which, in the absence of special training, evolved into a band of self-selected, autodidactic mercenaries. In Russian, these specialists are called "political technologists."<sup>5</sup> Another name for them would be "political designers" or, rather, "political decorators."<sup>6</sup>

Democratic decoration is a difficult and risky art. Regulation that is too restrictive or explicitly subversive to democratic institutions makes the regime clearly antidemocratic and defeats the decoration's purpose. However, if the regime imitates a democracy too thoroughly, it may be transformed into an actual—unpredictable—manifestation of the people's will, which is unacceptable to the state's leadership. Democratic decorators are sophisticated and cynical people. Usually trained in the humanities (history, languages, and often psychology), these artists justify their work by referring to "constructivism" or "postmodernism."

Whereas a very narrow elite solidifies the energy and security double monopoly, elected politicians are generally reduced to political decorations and political technologists are placed at the margins of politics or business. Russia's "oil-for-knowledge scheme" depopulates the Russian educational system, the public sphere, and intellectual life.<sup>7</sup> Imported expertise and technology is inexpensive if it is paid in oil. The importation has occurred on such a grand scale that Russia now faces a shortage of its own geologists, chemists, economists, and lawyers. The government and its educational bodies openly stated, in words and deeds, that they believe Russia is overeducated.<sup>8</sup> The state views local experts as dangerous because they may hold opinions that do not adhere to the state's position and may challenge the state's positions and legitimacy in the native cultural tongue. Exporting raw materials and importing knowledge and labor disrupts the correlation between

economic growth and social capital that is typical in the developed world. The oil-for-knowledge scheme depreciates social capital and contributes to Russia's demographic and cultural devastation.

Oil fields and pipelines, and the banks and houses their managers own, need a large, continuously growing security force to protect them from various (allegedly foreign but predominantly domestic) threats. The growing numbers of poorly educated, poorly paid security-service personnel play several roles: (1) they are loyal clients of the regime; (2) they preserve an archaic, premodern culture, which is based on collectivist values, initiation rites, and physical violence; (3) they spread this culture to the general Russian population by virtue of their numbers, discipline, and eagerness to use force; and (4) they reduce unemployment.

Western gas and oil producers use the Russian security services to protect drills, pipelines, and banks. Because investment, technology, financial services, and management come from the West, security costs make up a significant component of the domestic contribution to the national product. Russian oil providers are increasingly merging with security providers to cut down on costs.<sup>9</sup> As the energy and security sectors integrate and develop, the government and the Duma increasingly regulate the residual part of the national economy. They redistribute a portion of oil profits to benefit those not involved in the energy or security sector through various social agencies. The double monopoly's stakeholders are not interested in redistribution and effectively block it. Redistribution would immediately increase wages in the public sector and therefore security costs. Other industries' inability to compete with energy exports, and other power centers' inability to compete with the presidential administration, shrink all noncompetitive sectors. As long as energy prices remain high and security prices remain low, the Russian double monopoly produces inequality. The state interprets the resulting potential for social protest as a threat that requires security services, and the growth of cheap security becomes self-perpetuating.

### Rigging Elections

During the political technologists' short period of success between 1998 and 2005, they set up the Russian political scene's decorative order and exported their inventions and manipulations to the countries they perceived as culturally similar. They thought of such export as a convenient instrument to secure neighboring partners' stability. However, it was also an indirect instrument of regime self-legitimization. Political technologists' prominence in Russian politics was a product of the presidency's "winner-takes-all" nature and civil society's and the legal system's weakness. "Technological" intervention in politics involves using bribes or coercion to secure the vote of specific groups that are dependent on authorities, such as soldiers, prisoners, and in-patients—a practice known as the "administrative resource."<sup>10</sup> Technological intervention also includes violating fundraising laws, manipulating state-controlled media, rigging voter turnout, distorting the vote-count, and falsifying the results. "Minor" violations of the fair democratic process entail publishing false sociological data, bringing selected groups to vote while pushing other groups out of voting precincts, and so on. "Major" violations include falsifying results, which is a criminal offence under Russian law. When elections are consistently manipulated, it produces a self-perpetuating process that facilitates their reapplication, making technologists richer and the reelection of politicians easier. Since "major" violations began years ago, these interventions produced distrust and aversion to electoral procedures among the voting-age

population, which contributed to the rapid decline in voter turnout. Against the background of this low turnout, “minor” manipulations—selected groups stuffing or being kept away from the ballot box—produced better results. When most voters don’t participate in elections, these select groups make all the difference.

During the Ukraine’s November–December 2004 confrontation, voters shifted from a strategy of aversion to one of protest. A series of historical contingencies, including a long-term split among the elite, a weak and tired president, a popular candidate, an awkwardly imperialist Russian public relations campaign that awakened nationalist sentiment, and powerful European foreign support, all fostered an environment conducive to protest. Past revolutions addressed global, sometimes even metaphysical, problems. The recent revolutions, such as the Orange Revolution, have focused on procedural issues, placing less emphasis on substantive problems. The recent revolutions’ key position has been ending “unfair” elections.<sup>11</sup>

These revolutions are best defined as regime change caused by mass protest against perceived electoral violations. The new political situation that emerged in the revolutions’ wake is illustrated in Garry Kasparov’s statements. Kasparov, a founder and leader of Russia’s opposition United Civic Front, put forward “free and fair elections” as the front’s only platform.<sup>12</sup> This statement indicates the opposition’s awareness that elections are unfair. This knowledge, in turn, is likely to provoke a new wave of distrust of those in power, which the opposition should take into account. The United Civic Front should primarily mobilize protests, foregoing electoral politics. Kasparov notes, “The Kremlin dictates the rules of the game to us, then configures them into legal acts and makes us follow them. So, we have only the streets left.”<sup>13</sup> Mass participation in the name of fair elections is the key condition for these revolutions’ success: the people must be ready to vote, but more important, to protect and defend their vote. Post-Communist revolutions often take place in environments characterized by widespread melancholia and apathy. During the 2008 Russian elections, the opposition’s main task was arousing civic activism. According to Kasparov, the optimal organization for this goal is not the “outdated” political party, but a “front,” or some kind of “umbrella organization” that unites large groups of protestors advocating free elections.<sup>14</sup> Kasparov claims: “I can’t foresee for sure the outcome of free and fair elections in Russia. I doubt that the political force I belong to would gain electoral victory . . . but I want to see free and fair elections in Russia.”<sup>15</sup> Political technologists and their technologies effectively become the protests’ main target. Marxist revolutionaries primarily wanted liberation from class domination; national emancipation movements desired liberation from foreign occupation; and the contemporary opposition demands freedom from technological interventions.

### The Technologists’ Decline

As in classical political theory, the political technology assumes a certain “state of nature,” which would prevail in the political manipulations’ absence (technologists call this “sociology”). The more voters a political technologist deflects from the “state of nature,” the more skills the technologist must possess and the more money he or she must have invested in the campaign. Technologists attribute their successes to their skills and their failures to insufficient funds.

Political technologists helped the Kremlin win the 1996 presidential election, the 1999 and 2003 Duma elections, and numerous regional elections. Their success made the

Russian political community regard politics as the sum of political technologies. Politics as an autonomous public space has been replaced by technologies and technologists who provide their services to competing elites. Russian political elites now believe that technologists make the political process predictable and controllable. Everything can be calculated and manipulated; political success depends on technologists' skills, good luck, and money. However, Putin's cancellation of executive elections in the Russian provinces caused many political technologists to lose their jobs. Unemployed political technologists offered their services abroad. Russian consultants participated in elections in Israel, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Abkhazia, and elsewhere.

Democracy's "professionalization" is as old as democracy itself. Frankfurt School philosophers and the British "New Left" criticized democracy's overempowerment of professionals, lack of transparency, and its predominance of technical issues. But a market economy (multiple sources of funding), open society (multiple sources of information), and independent courts force technologists to compete, much like their patrons. In these conditions, the hired specialized labor does not represent a danger to democracy. If competition between political funding is constrained by law, tradition, and common sense, it is transformed into competition of political programs, parties, and leaders in which voters determine the winner. Specialists then play a technical role.

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The political technologists' interaction with the state's security apparatus in Russia is unique. When developed democratic states monopolize legitimate violence, they dissociate violence from democratic politics. The use of force for political purposes is incompatible with democracy. If a political technologist is able to direct the state's security agencies (including the police, courts, intelligence services, and drug control), it endangers democracy. Security agencies directing technologists to support one side and prosecute the other also threatens democracy. The merger between political technologists and the state's financial and information resources, especially its law-enforcement agencies, represents a grave danger for Russian democracy. Law-enforcement agencies' actions, such as dispersing demonstrations, banning political parties, making arrests, conducting searches, conducting prosecutions, and holding show trials, represent extremely powerful "technologies." Using the security apparatus for political means exerts enormous pressure on candidates and voters alike. A candidate can be publicly compromised in only a few days and at little expense if the security agencies exert pressure on him or her. Alternatively, a candidate might be removed from a political race in a court decision.

The merger of law enforcement and political technologists may indirectly cause political forces to polarize, foment mass protest movements, and encourage extremist groups that use illegitimate force or self-sacrifice. Violent acts cause political effects incommensurable with those caused by manipulating information or financial investments. However, mainstream political science, neoliberal in its origin and neoinstitutional in its language, does not pay

attention to such phenomena. Corporatist and rational-choice political models are misleading in their analysis of political technologies, manipulation, and democratic decoration, which, by their very nature, transgress the rational rules of legitimate political bodies.

The Kremlin's support for certain regimes is based on undermining democratic trends in the former Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Russian intervention in the Ukrainian presidential election was complex and multifaceted: (1) Several teams of Russian political technologists that the Kremlin organized and paid provided various forms of support to Victor Yanukovych. Leading technologist Marat Gelman coordinated Yanukovych's election campaign while Gleb Pavlovsky, another political technologist, was responsible for relations with Moscow.<sup>17</sup> (2) Russian mass media claimed future Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko's poisoning was caused by alcoholism. (3) The Russian public prosecutor's office accused Yulia Tymoshenko, the future prime minister, of bribing the Russian military.<sup>18</sup> (4) Russian television, especially the pro-Kremlin First Channel, which also broadcasts in Ukraine, organized a fierce anti-Orange campaign. This campaign was so obviously fabricated that more than a hundred Russian political scientists and social science professors boycotted the channel's news programs.<sup>19</sup> (5) Putin visited Yanukovych during the campaign twice and congratulated him on his victory.<sup>20</sup> (6) Putin also issued decrees changing Russian immigration laws to benefit the previously illegal Ukrainian workers in Russia in order to help Yanukovych.

Soon after the Ukrainian election, Moldovan authorities expelled Russian political technologists from their local elections, believing that voters would appreciate such a measure (they did). The changed balance of power in Ukraine and the geopolitical situation in Europe will have long-term effects on Russian domestic politics. The Orange Revolution proved that political technologists are capable of manipulating institutional situations, but are impotent in states of emergency or revolution. The mass media is powerless when hundreds of thousands of people crowd the streets and the opposition or independent observers immediately disclose falsified vote counts, ensuring that the general public is aware of the manipulations. Bribed or fake "countermasses" are ineffective against people who are aware of their choices. Even troops are unreliable when the masses are prepared for self-sacrifice.

Recognizing their defeat, the Russian political technologists, headed by Gelman and Pavlovsky, attributed their defeat to Western—especially American—political technologists' financial supremacy.<sup>21</sup> According to the political technologists, the only reason for defeat is insufficient funds. Spontaneous, unpaid mass participation is impossible in this logic. Taras Chornovil, the Ukrainian political technologist who headed the Yanukovych campaign, told the *Nevskoye vremya* newspaper that his opponents hypnotized people in the *maidans* using "Buddhist technologies."<sup>22</sup> After his failure, Pavlovsky offered a explanation that was less exotic: "We lost to the Revolution."<sup>23</sup>

When mass protest against unfair elections occurs, the armed forces' behavior is a critical variable. In Tbilisi, Kyiv, and Bishkek, the police, army, and secret services did not interfere. This relatively new pattern allowed the revolutions to develop peacefully.<sup>24</sup> Later, in Uzbekistan in 2005, the security forces killed protesters, and the revolution failed.<sup>25</sup> Protesters in Belarus met a similar fate, indicating that Russian counterrevolutionary efforts will use similar tactics.<sup>26</sup> In mass violations of democracy, neutral armed forces act as a decisively revolutionary factor. It is worth speculating about the possible reasons for their neutrality:

1. Servicemen are discontent because of financial constraints and low morale.
2. Servicemen are inexperienced and untrained for situations involving popular unrest, and fear a large number of victims.
3. The military and security elites have internal cleavages and conflicts; some commanders support the protest movements and sabotage other commanders' orders.
4. Top military officers hesitate to attack protesters because they fear potentially losing their status and property (in the country or abroad) as the result of legal prosecution. Serbian commanders' fates represent a model for such fears.

### Inoculating against Future Revolutions

The Russian government is addressing these issues, even though few experts believe that Russia is approaching an electoral revolution.<sup>27</sup> After the Orange Revolution, the Kremlin administration and its political consultants launched a campaign aimed at preventing similar events. Realizing that “general elections in Russia may become a source of political destabilization,” the Russian government amended electoral laws.<sup>28</sup> In June 2005, these amendments became the topic for high-level discussion between Dmitry Medvedev, the presidential administration’s head, and Albert Veshnyakov, then Central Election Commission chair. The resulting “preventive measures” essentially meant subjecting more categories of electoral violations to criminal prosecution. The Kremlin’s logic was simple. Increasing administrative control over election campaigns and reinforcing punishment should lower the risk of popular unrest after general elections and reduce the possibility of dissident opinion inside the Central Election Commission.

Nikolai Patrushev, the Federal Security Service’s director, made it clear that the Russian secret service, together with its partner secret services in Belarus and Uzbekistan, would take all possible measures to prevent new revolutions.<sup>29</sup> Because a Belarussian revolution’s victory or failure would have a serious impact on Russian public opinion, this goal is likely to become a key point for Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space.

The government’s assault on Russia’s independent civil society and attempt to replace it with state-sponsored activities includes making the Public Chamber—an institution with uncertain functions, unelected membership, and improvised rules—the Russian parliament’s de facto third chamber. The Kremlin’s political technologists designed the Public Chamber, and a significant number of them became members, along with an almost random assortment of dignitaries, sportsmen, actresses, and so on. More important, the Duma passed new legislation in 2005 that significantly changed nongovernmental organizations’ (NGOs) status in Russia, subjecting them to administrative control and making it more difficult for them to rely on foreign grants.<sup>30</sup> Simultaneously, the government initiated a new round of spy hunts—investigations focused on Russian NGOs and Western diplomats.<sup>31</sup>

Before the Orange Revolution, Russian youth were thought to be society’s most passive demographic, almost entirely uninterested in politics. This perception has changed since the Ukrainian elections. The political technologists’ usual tactics involved manipulating older groups’ votes by bringing them to the polls with various promises or bribes. Now the strategies include disbursing government funds for “Youth Policy” to “tame” existing organizations and prevent them from joining the opposition.<sup>32</sup> A pro-Kremlin youth organization, called the Youth Democratic Antifascist Movement, or Nashi (Ours), was launched in April of 2005. This organization, headed by Vasily Yakemenko, the former leader of pro-Kremlin organization Coming

Together, formulated its goals as protecting Russia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, promoting modernization, training a future Russian elite, supporting Putin's policies, and fighting oligarchic capitalism.<sup>33</sup> Nashi listed fascists, "defeatists," the United States, and international terrorists as their enemies.<sup>34</sup>

In mid-May 2005, Nashi organized the "Our Victory" march in Moscow, which about 60,000 people attended. Organizers enjoyed the regime's full support.<sup>35</sup> Nashi activists study history, international relations, and economics in education centers. These courses are united by their emphasis on Russian uniqueness, Western hostility toward Russia, and the need to reshape the Russian "defeatist" elite.<sup>36</sup> The movement's

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task is to essentially counteract the revolution in Russia. Nashi's propaganda is reminiscent of Cold War era rhetoric. In a lecture to Nashi members, Pavlovsky said: "You must be ready to disperse fascist demonstrations and physically oppose any attempts of anti-constitutional coup d'état."<sup>37</sup> Should such movements fail to prevent mass protest, the regime will respond by using force. After the Ukrainian revolution, the Russian government's strategic goal has been to desensitize society to violence.

This includes measures aimed at preventing the army's professionalization by keeping salaries low, housing unavailable, and basing discipline on premodern values and rituals as an effective way to preserve servicemen's obedience.

Discrediting foreign humanitarian organizations and formulating the custom-made concept of the "sovereign democracy," Vladislav Surkov, the presidential administration's deputy chief and the unofficial sponsor of Russian political technologists, claimed that foreign humanitarian organizations are ruled by their secret services: "Everyone knows that the head of 'Freedom House' is the former chief of the CIA. Only an idiot can believe in the humanitarian mission of this office."<sup>38</sup> Surkov argued that the color revolutions are undemocratic because "the basic democratic principle is the peaceful succession of power which should take place in procedural terms. This means first of all legal procedure."<sup>39</sup> The succession in Ukraine, according to Surkov, was characterized by "violations of all thinkable and unthinkable laws."<sup>40</sup> The idea of "sovereign democracy" must oppose these revolutions' undemocratic natures. The government views political opposition, especially pro-Western opposition, as a threat to sovereignty and treasonous. By framing revolution in this context, Surkov hopes to avoid a repetition of the Ukrainian model in Russia. However, he understands the actual character of the events that he leads. "We, Russians, should not let ourselves to be turned into special troops who protect the Western oil pipes."<sup>41</sup> He did not explain how he hopes to avoid this outcome, which the Kremlin's double monopoly has already caused. To reverse this, the double monopoly over energy and violence must be deconstructed.

The concentration of various means of violence, legitimate or not, under the state's monopoly has been accompanied by various ideological measures aimed at desensitizing

the population to violence. The Kremlin cannot abandon elections, but it also cannot run free and fair elections. Its double monopoly on resources and violence allows the Kremlin to direct political processes by bribing the electorate, manipulating elections, and censoring the press. Such a regime may interpret the political manipulations' failure as a security threat and use violence to survive. Whether the current regime ends with *perestroika* or a revolution, it is unlikely that something resembling the protests in Ukrainian maidans will take place in Moscow.

## NOTES

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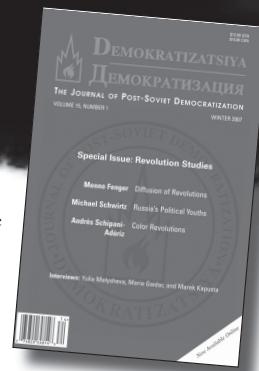
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