



**TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP PROGRAM  
FOR “LEADERSHIP ACADEMY” ALUMNI**

**FROM REVOLUTION TO CONFLICT: HOW FOREIGN POLICY REALIGNMENTS  
TRIGGER SECURITY CRISES IN THE POST-SOVIET REGION**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to highlight whether security issues followed by color revolutions in post-Soviet region are caused by regime changes. A case study analysis is conducted, using 3 cases: Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Georgia’s “Rose revolution” was followed by the Russian-Georgian war and the annexation of Crimea came after the “Orange revolution”. However, Kyrgyzstan did not experience any security threat after the regime change. The research argues that the regime changes in the mentioned countries became the reason for security challenges; and explains why Kyrgyzstan is an exception. Comparative method, content analysis and process tracing are applied, arguing that while the fact of revolution does not have a direct influence on the conflict development, the abrupt foreign policy reorientation serves as a primary reason.

The policy of strengthening ties with EU and the western countries, which replaced Russian dependency, was viewed by the latter as a threat to its national interests and ended up with the 2008 war in Georgia and the annexation of Crimea. At the same time the revolutionary government in Kyrgyzstan did not change the country’s foreign policy towards closer ties with the West, thus avoiding any aggressive reaction from Russia. The paper emphasizes the influence of strategic importance of the mentioned countries on the reaction of the hegemon to abrupt foreign policy changes, demonstrating that in the post-Soviet region sudden foreign policy pivot can cause serious security problems.

## **Introduction**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states faced the challenge of forming a foreign policy. With the exception of the Baltic countries, which immediately started the process of European integration, Russian-oriented elites came to power in other post-independent states, which ensured the status of the post-Soviet region as a "zone of Russian influence". However, the color revolutions, backed by US and EU institutions, formed governments with an anti-Russian orientation in most of the cases. In 2003, after the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili came to power and abruptly adopted a policy of European integration, moving away from Russian influence.

After the "Orange Revolution", Viktor Yushchenko came to power in Ukraine, who brought up the issue of the Russian Black Sea fleet and joining NATO. These coups were followed by Russia's aggressive policy, which was expressed on the one hand by the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, and on the other hand by the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The situation was a little different in Kyrgyzstan. Here, the revolutionary authorities continued the policy of balancing, even deepening relations with Russia in some areas. Therefore, it is important to understand how the change of foreign policy affected the security conditions. This article aims to find out whether color revolutions are the cause of conflicts in the region, and if so, to explain why Kyrgyzstan is an exception. It suggests that abrupt pivots in foreign policy plays a crucial role in determining national security outcomes in the post-Soviet region.

## **Comparing Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Foreign Policies**

### **Change in Georgia's Foreign Policy as a Cause of War**

Despite the fact that the conflict in the northern parts of Georgia has ancient roots, changes in foreign policy over the past decade directly influenced the escalation of the conflict and the outbreak of war in 2008. This becomes evident after comparing pre- and post-revolutionary leaders' policies. The pre-revolutionary policy pursued by E. Shevardnadze can be described as "balancing between the West and Russia". It's worth mentioning that he headed the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs before coming to presidency, which may have played an important role in shaping his foreign policy.

Russian-Georgian relations initially had many problems. The tension was determined by the conflict in Abkhazia, and Shevardnadze continued the policy of zero concessions on this issue, but after Georgia realized that the West was not interested in this issue, and Shevardnadze himself could barely get out of Sukhumi, he began to pursue a more restrained policy towards Russia. The lack of interest from the West forced Georgia to find common ground with Russia. Thus, at the end of 1993, Georgia joined the CIS. Moreover, in 1995 according to "barter", a military agreement, Georgia agreed to the deployment of a military base on its territory, in exchange for which Russia was to transfer military equipment to Tbilisi. The anti-Russian image of his political opponent, the previous president, Gamsakhurdia, also played an important role in the formation of Shevardnadze's pro-Russian image. All this influenced the rapprochement between Georgia and Russia at the beginning of Shevardnadze's rule.

On the other hand, after the enlargement of EU and NATO in 1995 and 1999 accordingly, the Georgian government felt the opportunity of "proliferation of friends"<sup>1</sup>. This was later followed by Georgia joining GUAM in 1997 and sending military contingent to Iraq during the American intervention there. However, despite all these efforts, Shevardnadze didn't sever relations with Moscow, taking into account that Georgia's energy sector became dependent on Russia's Gazprom and RAO UES of Russia for the supply of electricity and gas necessary for the republic's survival. His phrase, stated in 2003, is well known: "When we say that the United States is our ally, this does not mean that we do not look towards others<sup>2</sup>."

The straw that broke the camel's back for the US was the statement made by the Georgian president on March 24, 2003, after a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Georgia is ready to transform itself into a federal republic, grant Abkhazia, as a subject of the federation, the broadest rights and recognize Russia as the main guarantor of Georgia's post-conflict federal structure," he said<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. "Relations Between Russia and Georgia." Accessed November 12, 2024. <https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/ge/1930775/>.

<sup>2</sup> Civil Georgia. "Russia's State Duma Backs Abkhazia's Independence." Accessed November 14, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/104582>.

<sup>3</sup> Кулик, В. «Грузинское танго». Центр политических и геополитических исследований. Accessed 10 February, 2024. <http://cdpgs.ukrbiz.net/archtext.ukrbiz?arch=7296>.

After the “Rose revolution” the new authorities under the leadership of Saakashvili radically changed the foreign policy direction of the country, which was fixed in the strategic documents. In 2005, a new concept of national security of Georgia was adopted, where it is noted that integration into NATO and the EU is the main priority of Georgia's foreign and security policy, and the need of restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity within the borders recognized by the international community was also mentioned, bearing in mind the situation in Abkhazia<sup>4</sup>.

These actions, of course, were immediately reflected in Russia's policy. In August 2008, the Russo-Georgian War began. That same month, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a document according to which Russia officially recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, which was followed by the outbreak of military action on the border with Georgia and in 2009, Georgia left the CIS, an organization that marks the borders of Russian sphere of influence in the region.

Thus, after the Rose Revolution, Georgia's foreign policy changed dramatically, and this change directly affected relations with Russia. If the balanced, multi-vector policy of E. Shevardnadze did not lead to a sharp aggravation of relations between Russia and Georgia, moreover, close cooperation between them was emphasized, after the color revolution, when the new president Saakashvili significantly changed Georgia's foreign policy vector to the West, rejecting any cooperation with Russia and giving preference to NATO and integration with the EU, which led to a sharp reaction from the Russian side and the resumption of the conflict on the Georgian border.

### **Change in Ukraine's Foreign Policy as a Reason for the Annexation of Crimea**

Since independence, the changes in power in Ukraine have been determined by one main issue: to move towards European integration or to remain in the zone of Russian influence. After the “Orange revolution” in 2004, the elite that came to power under the leadership of Yuschenko dramatically and radically changed the country's foreign policy. Previous President Kuchma came to power with the support of Russian-oriented voters

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<sup>4</sup> Georgia. National Security Concept of Georgia. Tbilisi: Government of Georgia, 2005. Accessed November 2, 2024.

[https://gfsis.org.ge/media/download/GSAC/resources/National\\_Security\\_Concept\\_Georgia.pdf](https://gfsis.org.ge/media/download/GSAC/resources/National_Security_Concept_Georgia.pdf)

in the eastern part of the country and actively participated in regional Russian initiatives regardless of the possibilities of European integration. The intensive development of Ukrainian-Russian relations was facilitated by the fact that the EU and NATO did not consider the possibility of Ukraine joining these organizations. An important milestone in Russian-Ukrainian relations was the Budapest Memorandum (Russia, USA, UK), which guaranteed the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine<sup>5</sup>. Ukraine then joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and gave Russia its nuclear arsenal, and in 1997 the parties signed a major treaty on friendship and cooperation between the countries, finally recognizing each other's borders and enshrining the principle of strategic partnership. In 2003, Leonid Kuchma and Vladimir Putin finally signed an agreement on the state border between the countries, fully coordinating it on the map. The Crimean Peninsula was also clearly defined as Ukrainian in the agreement.

And taking into account this reality, the policy of the post-revolutionary authorities was a drastic change, which could not but provoke Russia's reaction. The main foreign policy issues during this period between Ukraine and Russia were gas problems, the problem of the presence of the Black Sea Fleet, border demarcation and Ukraine's membership in NATO. The new authorities accused Russia of genocide, bringing up the issue of the "Golodomor", which until then was presented as a common tragedy<sup>6</sup>. Yushchenko defended the withdrawal of the Russian fleet from the Black Sea. That Russia could see a threat from Ukraine is evident in the 2009 Ukrainian National Security Strategy: "...the intensification of processes of forming spheres of influence or zones of geopolitical responsibility, accompanied by an increase in conflict. . . the strengthening of multi-vector external influence in the region, the threat of preventive use of armed forces by individual states outside their borders; further escalation of conflicts in the Black Sea-Caspian region... allows the issue of territorial claims to return to the regional agenda"<sup>7</sup>. Russia's first response was the gas crisis. And if it seemed that after the 2010 elections, the

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<sup>5</sup>Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации. Меморандум о взаимопонимании. Министерство иностранных дел РФ, 1994. Доступ 25 октября 2024 года. <https://www.mid.ru/upload/medialibrary/fe3/%D0%B1.%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BC.pdf>. Accessed November 9, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Pannier, Bruce. "Yushchenko Calls Holodomor 'Essence of Genocide.'" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 28, 2007. [https://www.rferl.org/a/Yushchenko\\_Calls\\_Tragedy\\_Essence\\_Genocide/1351907.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Yushchenko_Calls_Tragedy_Essence_Genocide/1351907.html). Accessed November 2, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> "Про Стратегію національної безпеки України." Указ Президента України № 105/2007, 12 лютого 2007. Зміни внесені згідно з Указом Президента № 389/2012 від 08.06.2012. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/105/2007#Text> (accessed November 14, 2024).

administration of the new, more pro-Russian President Yanukovich would not allow the situation to escalate, the events of 2014, which were mostly a continuation of the 2004 revolution, and the expulsion of Yanukovich from the country led to a harsh Russian response, the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

### **Kyrgyzstan as an exception**

The situation is completely different in Kyrgyzstan. No security problems arose here after the coup. The main reason for this is that the revolutionary authorities did not embark on a drastic foreign policy change. The foundations of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy were laid by President Akayev. Akayev began to build Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy, relying on neutrality and multi-vectorism. So, in the early 90s Kyrgyzstan was called the island of democracy<sup>8</sup>. In 1994, Kyrgyzstan joined the NATO program "partnership for peace". On the other hand, Akayev led a fairly active policy on issues of integration in the post-Soviet space. In 1996, Russian language acquired the status of the second state language in Kyrgyzstan, and a customs agreement was concluded with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. However, after the Batken events, the situation began to change, as security problems arose, and Kyrgyzstan needed strong alliance relations. In July 2000 a declaration of eternal friendship, alliance and partnership between Russia and Kyrgyzstan was signed, which testified to the clear position of Kyrgyzstan.

The year 2001 was a defining moment for Kyrgyzstan, changing the geopolitical significance of the region. This is especially important for the United States, given Kyrgyzstan's role as a "passage" to Russia, China and Afghanistan at the same time. This is proven by the deployment of American and Russian bases on Kyrgyz territory. Nowhere in the world were American and Russian bases so close to each other and this, of course, was explosive, and first of all for the Kyrgyz leadership. President Akayev tried to satisfy the Russian leadership by providing a military base<sup>9</sup>, in 2001, becoming one of the founding countries of the SCO, in 2002 a full member of the CSTO, thus violating its

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory Gleason, Asel Kerimbekova, and Svetlana Kozhirova, "Realism and the Small State: Evidence from Kyrgyzstan," *International Politics* 45, no. 1 (January 2008): 47 (accessed November 13, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Sari Yasar, "Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev," *Journal of International Affairs*, Autumn 2012, Volume 17, Issue 3, 141. [https://sam.gov.tr/pdf/perceptions/Volume-XVII/autumn-2012/yasar\\_sari.pdf](https://sam.gov.tr/pdf/perceptions/Volume-XVII/autumn-2012/yasar_sari.pdf) (accessed November 13, 2024).

"neutrality", which Akayev adhered to at the beginning of his presidency. After the revolution, Kurmanbek Bakiyev came to power, but, unlike Georgia and Ukraine, the new authorities did not change the foreign policy vector of Kyrgyzstan, on the contrary, they further strengthened relations with Russia. Bakiyev's first presidential visit was to Russia, where he signed a number of agreements on military and economic cooperation between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, thus clearly demonstrating the priority directions of foreign policy. On April 19, 2006, a few days before Bakiyev's official visit to Moscow, the Kyrgyz leader said: "If a new agreement on the terms of Bishkek is not signed by June 1, 2006, Kyrgyzstan will terminate its bilateral agreement with the United States on the deployment of the American air base in Ganja<sup>10</sup>." This was about increasing the rent for the American base, and it increased from 2 to 17 million dollars.

Thus, in Kyrgyzstan after the color revolution, conflicts did not arise and did not develop, as was the case in Ukraine and Georgia, but this is not an exception to the general rules, but is due to the fact that, unlike the other two countries, in Kyrgyzstan the post-revolutionary authorities did not take the path of a sharp change in foreign policy, but, on the contrary, further strengthened relations with the Russian Federation and instead of the policy of "Kyrgyz neutrality" chose the path of integration in the Eurasian space.

### **Factors influencing the change in the strategic importance of Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan**

Eduard Shevardnadze's "balancing" policy ultimately failed, and in matters of national security he had to rely on agreements with the Russian side, and the latter did not react so sharply to Shevardnadze's pro-NATO positions. However, at the same time, Saakashvili's policy found a strong response in the West, unlike the initial period of Shevardnadze's rule, when he tried to knock on the door of Western integration, but to no avail. The reason is that in the last years of Shevardnadze's rule, the strategic importance of Georgia for both Russia and the West changed dramatically, which became an indirect factor in both the Georgian revolution and the Russian-Georgian war. The first factor that changed the importance of Georgia both for the US and Russia is 09/11, after which the United States acquired state interests of national security significance in Central

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<sup>10</sup> Ulugbek Juraev, "Kyrgyzstan Attacks United States, Relying on Russia and China," April 2006. <http://www.analitika.org/article/php?story=20060425041313997> (accessed November 13, 2024).

Asia, especially in Afghanistan, established a military presence in Central Asia and challenged Russia's energy dominance in the region and the Caucasus. Georgia is an important access route to this region. The second important factor was the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipelines. This explains the fact that no matter how much Shevardnadze knocked on the door of Europe and NATO, they didn't respond, and Russia did not consider this a threat to its security. But after the revolution, when the strategic importance of Georgia changed, and Western countries found interests in Georgia, Russia began to react more strictly to Georgia's foreign policy. This was enshrined in Putin's Munich speech<sup>11</sup>, which resulted in the war in 2008. It is critical to note that authority and coercion are not synonymous; authority is founded on societal acceptability, whereas coercion is based on force and frequently fails to accomplish compliance<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, despite Russia's 2008 invasion, Georgia continues to form partnerships with other countries, demonstrating that genuine power is based on the legitimacy of the right to rule.

The fact that Ukraine has a much greater strategic importance for the Kremlin is evidenced by a number of Putin's statements. In its March 4 speech, Moscow announced that "...first of all, we wanted to support the people of Crimea, but we also followed a certain logic: if we do nothing, Ukraine will one day be drawn into NATO"<sup>13</sup>. Putin described the current situation in Ukraine as unstable and potentially capable of developing into a scenario in which Russia's territorial integrity would be under threat. But the strategic importance of Ukraine for both Russia and the West showed that the basis of this phenomenon is not cognitive psychology, but the anarchic system of international relations. The Ukrainian pipeline system is the main route delivering Russian gas and oil to Europe. In this regard, the Nord Stream could be of great importance for Europe in the context of diversifying energy transportation routes. However, the Ukrainian system remains the main one. It is an important communication link in the implementation of Russia's geopolitical project as an "energy superpower.". Another factor influencing

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<sup>11</sup> Putin, Vladimir. "Speech by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin at the 43rd Munich Security Conference." Munich Security Conference, February 10, 2007.

<https://www.securityconference.de/en/news/article/speech-by-president-of-the-russian-federation-vladimir-putin/>. (accessed November 13, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Gamez, Daniel H. B. Understanding Spheres of Influence: A Proposed Conceptualization and the Case of Russo-Georgian Relations. Linköping University, Spring 2024. Accessed November 13, 2024. <https://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1873499/FULLTEXT01.pdf>, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Kremlin. "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin." April 17, 2014.

<https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796> (accessed November 13, 2024).

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Ukraine's strategic importance was Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. This is a military base that prevents the Black Sea from becoming an internal NATO sea.

Unlike Georgia and Ukraine, where the interests of the superpowers were largely determined by energy resources, Kyrgyzstan, without having a large resource reserve, has become a hub of geopolitical forces due to its geographical location. This is especially important for the United States, given Kyrgyzstan's role as a "passage" to Russia, China, and Afghanistan at the same time. Kyrgyzstan's strategic importance for the United States increased after the events of September 11. Kyrgyzstan's neutrality, which was the basis of Akayev's foreign policy, was violated by the deployment of an American military base, which became the basis of a security dilemma. Russia, of course, regarded the establishment of an American military base as a threat to its national security and two years later opened a Russian military base in Kant on much better financial terms. This security dilemma persisted in various forms until 2005. Bakiyev, who came to power after the revolution, replaced Kyrgyzstan's neutrality with a pro-Russian stance.

For the first time in the post-Soviet space, a color revolution was not followed by the coming to power of a pro-Western government. Russia's policy in Kyrgyzstan before 2001 was no different from its policy in other Central Asian countries, and Kyrgyzstan's neutrality was not considered a threat to Russia's national security. After 2001, when the US military base in Manas was opened, Russia's policy underwent significant changes, the Kyrgyz problem was securitized, but, unlike the US strategic policy, Russia pursued an event-driven policy here, taking countermeasures to prevent US expansion, which resulted in the Russian military base being located in Kyrgyzstan.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, the development of the mentioned conflicts in the region has a complex causal system, in which an important place has the drastic change in foreign policy strategy after the color revolutions. This happened in Georgia and Ukraine, where the conflicts subsequently developed in the form of the Georgian-Russian war and the annexation of Crimea, while in Kyrgyzstan there was no development of the conflict, as well as a sharp change in the foreign policy vector after the revolution. Kyrgyzstan as an exception showed that, although the revolution itself is not the cause of the development of the

conflict in this matter, the drastic change in foreign policy, logically following from this, has reflected this influence.

Strategic importance also plays a major role in both the emergence of color revolutions and the development of conflicts. The strategic importance of Ukraine and Georgia is of an energy and economic nature, including also components of integration and expansion with NATO and/or the EU, and the strategic importance of Kyrgyzstan is largely due to its geographical location. Despite the fact that Kyrgyzstan had almost the same strategic importance, Kyrgyz neutrality did not turn into a pro-Western policy, which restrained the further development of the conflict. There were attempts to change the foreign policy vector before the color revolutions, however, when the strategic importance of a given country changed and the subsequent attitude of the West towards that country, Russia's reaction to the loss of important strategic points in its zone of influence also changed, creating a pro-Western axis along its own borders. Future research should explore whether this pattern holds in other regions, such as Latin America.

## **Recommendations**

In international relations, the establishment of order against an anarchic system involves the use of force to impose the rules and laws established by superior powers. Resistance by subordinates to these rules and laws leads to the use of force by the one who imposes them. The discussed three examples demonstrate that post-revolutionary authorities in the post-Soviet region should not follow the path of Ukraine and Georgia and challenge the established world order if they want to avoid the securitization of that policy and security problems. The latest country where a color revolution took place, Armenia, must take all this into account and if there is a political goal to withdraw from the zone of Russian influence, then this should be done not abruptly, but gradually, without challenging the established Russian regional world order. And although we cannot clearly assert that the absence of Russia's pro-Armenian stance during the 2020 war was solely a consequence of Armenia's change in foreign policy, taking into account the influence of two other important factors: the disruption of the balance of power in the South Caucasus and the start of the Ukrainian war, nevertheless, in order to avoid continued losses, Armenia must take into account that abrupt changes in foreign policy are likely to lead to serious security problems and escalation of the situation.

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