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Power and persuasion: Nonviolent strategies to influence state security forces in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine (2004)

Anika Locke Binnendijk*, Ivan Marovic

*Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University,
160 Packard Avenue, Medford, MA 02155, USA*

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Abstract

During the Serbian *Otpor* movement to oust Milosevic (2000) and the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution” (2004), the organizers developed explicit strategies to increase the costs of repression and to undermine the willingness of state security forces to engage in violent acts against them. By employing varying combinations of persuasion and deterrence tailored to the particular institutions they were addressing, the movements were able to successfully avoid a major crackdown.

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Introduction

State security forces constitute a critical center of gravity for illiberal regimes. As instruments of coercion, police and military institutions can apply wide-range

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 617 894 4839.

E-mail address: anika.binnendijk@tufts.edu (A.L. Binnendijk).

sanctions against potential challengers. The capacity of a regime to wield this instrument may therefore have direct implications for its ability to consolidate political power. As Dahl (1971) notes, “the likelihood that a government will tolerate an opposition increases as the expected costs of suppression increase...and with a reduction in the capacity of the government to use violence or socio-economic sanctions to suppress an opposition.”

Strategists of nonviolent conflict argue, therefore, that one core objective of an unarmed movement should be to undermine the loyalties and obedience of a regime’s police, military, and other essential “pillars of support” (Sharp, 1973; Ackerman and Kruegler, 1994; Helvey, 2004). Whether by convincing individuals in uniform of the legitimacy of their cause, negotiating mutually accommodative agreements, or raising the political, economic, and moral costs of suppression, movements can play a potentially decisive role in the regime’s capacity to employ soldiers and policemen against them (Sharp, 1973).¹

The Serbian *Otpor* movement to oust Slobodon Milosevic (2000) and the Ukrainian Orange movement (2004) both achieved this objective. Using combinations of persuasive and deterrent techniques, movement organizers developed explicit strategies to increase the costs of repression and to undermine the willingness of state security forces to engage in repressive acts against them. This article will examine the strategies implemented and their effects in each case study.

Learning from the past

The leaderships of both the Serbian and the Ukrainian movements drew from previous failures as they developed their strategies. In Ukraine, tent camps and protests throughout 1990s had gained little ground against the competitive authoritarian regime of President Leonid Kuchma. In fall 2000, the grisly murder of Ukrainian journalist Georgiy Gongadze, allegedly on the orders of Kuchma, had sparked protests in many areas of the country.² However, although the opposition had threatened to put 200,000 protesters on the streets, maximum turnout hovered at merely around 20,000 to 50,000, a point confidently highlighted by Kuchma in summer 2004. (*Eurasia Daily Monitor*, January 24, 2005) (Kuzio, 2005a, b). In March 2001, protests culminated in a violent clash between demonstrators and police forces, and led to the collapse of the movement.

Serbian organizers reflected on the failed anti-Milosevic protests in 1996–1997, which had ended with a whimper and impressed upon them the difficulty of sustaining a long-term popular presence in the streets. They also recalled the demonstrations of March 9 1991, when the Serbian Renewal Movement, led by Vuk Draskovic, had called for a rally to protest the biased reporting of state-controlled television.

¹ Sharp notes the dynamics of “conversion,” “accommodation,” and “coercion.” pp. 705–776.

² Tapes released in 2000 by Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz, made illicitly in Kuchma’s office by presidential guard Mykola Melnychenko, reportedly reveal Kuchma ordering an official to “deal with” Gongadze.

Milosevic responded by sending in police forces to disperse protesters with tear gas and water cannons. Protesters retaliated with violence and by the day's end, army tanks patrolled the streets of Belgrade. Draskovic was arrested and the protest was crushed.

In light of these failures, Serbian *Otpor* strategists concluded that two objectives would need to guide their future planning. The first was to rapidly draw at least one million protesters to Belgrade in order to confront Milosevic. The second was to ensure that order to shoot would not be followed by Serbian security forces. As they pursued these goals, *Otpor* decided, they would place a priority on the maintenance of nonviolence discipline within their ranks.

Ukrainian planners came to a similar conclusion. One of the primary architects of the Ukrainian Orange protests later noted that:

In 2002 and 2003 we carried out careful analysis of the reasons for failures of previous protests, and the major reasons were: the small number of people and the aggressive nature of such events. So our conclusion was that we needed to get out as many people as possible and to make sure that the protests would not be aggressive. We realized that no military—no special units—would dare to take up arms against such a huge group of people. (Senior Our Ukraine coordinator, interview, 2005)³

In both cases, blatant election fraud provided a high-profile rallying point around which the movements would be able to mobilize large numbers of citizens. Both the Serbian and the Ukrainian oppositions thus explicitly built their strategies around exposing and challenging fraudulent election results. After Milosevic's falsification of presidential ballots on September 24, 2000, the opposition organized a series of strikes and blockades, but even more arose up spontaneously. Tensions rose for two weeks until the opposition announced the deadline for Milosevic to accept Kostunica's victory by 3:00 PM on October 5 and called for a rally in Belgrade in front of the Federal parliament. About 800,000 protesters attended from throughout Serbia. (*Nedeljni Telegraph* weekly magazine, November 1, 2000).

In Ukraine, protests began on Monday, November 22, when, amidst widespread allegations of election fraud the second round of the presidential elections were projected by official tallies in favor of Victor Yanukovych, President Leonid Kuchma's Prime Minister and chosen successor.⁴ The opposition had recognized the probability of fraud long before election season—an April 2003 internal memo from the Ukrainian opposition coalition emphasized that the elections would “be a game without rules, unprecedented competition of informational, organizational, financial and administrative resources for the regime...we need allies and at least 500,000

³ Those individuals whose names are not included in the article agreed to be interviewed under the condition of anonymity. They will therefore be identified by their general positions in the Ukrainian government, political coalition or other professional identities.

⁴ Victor Yushchenko won the first round of elections, on October 31 by a small margin over Victor Yanukovych, prompting an electoral run-off. Domestic and international observers had reported widespread cases of voter manipulation and fraud in both the first and second rounds of the elections.

active supporters” (Our Ukraine internal memo, April 2003). *Pora*, a youth-based civic mobilization organization, had been actively preparing for post-election protests after widespread arrests of its activists in mid-October 2004 (Kaskiv, 2005). The ultimate scope of the crowds in Kiev, however, exceeded the expectations of both the regime and the opposition leadership (Zolotariov, Y., interview, 2005). On the first day after the opposition leader Victor Yushchenko’s call to the Kiev streets, 100,000 protesters arrived on Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti), known colloquially as the “Maidan.” Over the next 24 hours, the number had nearly doubled. By Wednesday, November 24, hundreds of thousands more had arrived from regions around the country, and by the end the first week, according to most estimates, nearly a million Ukrainians had gathered in Kiev (Kaskiv, 2005).⁵

Rapid mass mobilization, both movements realized, would significantly raise the costs of repression for the regime in power. While the steady repression that had defined the regimes’ previous responses—raids, arrests, beatings and shadowy assassinations—carried relatively low risks of public backlash, a major crackdown on hundreds of thousands of citizens could wield a hefty blow to their already vulnerable legitimacy.

Tactical considerations thus had strategic implications. *Otpor* counted on their ability to clog the narrow streets of Belgrade with protesters, hindering the rapid movement of people or vehicles. In Ukrainian, the rear entrances of Kiev proved relatively easy to block as well. Therefore, an early focus on filling the public and symbolic space at the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) was critical, and the opposition was ultimately surprised by their ability to achieve this. In both cases, the sheer size of the crowds would have made it difficult for the regimes to disband protesters without engaging in “high risk” activities, considerably raising the stakes involved in issuing, or obeying, orders to crack down.

Recognizing the need for a swift influx of protesters to protect those already in the capital, Ukrainian opposition coordinators extended particular efforts to reach out to the population of Kiev and the surrounding region in the run-up to the elections.⁶ Kiev area residents were responsible for the rapid escalation of the protests in the city over the first 48 hours after Yushchenko’s call. The protests, which ultimately lasted over three weeks, were marked by continued attention to the “numbers calculation.” (*Guardian*, May 13, 2005). Opposition leaders also introduced a 24-hour live camera feed on the Maidan, which was transmitted to the pro-opposition Fifth Channel. This tactics was particularly effective in creating disincentives to crack down on

⁵ Though highway police initially attempted to follow orders to stop incoming traffic to Kiev, within the first 48 hours an overwhelming flow of traffic and the willingness of travelers to seek alternate routes led them to largely abandon their efforts. One *Pora* activist noted that “when the big roads are blocked, you always have the small roads that lead to the city, and people who lived in this region helped people.” Bezverkha, interview, 2005. Various explanations have been offered as to why Kuchma did not use more reliable troops to block access to the city, but it appears that the regime both underestimated the threat posed by protesters and desired to avoid actions that would severely compromise its domestic and international legitimacy.

⁶ They also believed that in order to rally the broader Ukrainian population, “it was important that people in the capital go out in the streets.” (Stetskiv, interview, 2005).

the tent camp in the evening, when the crowds had dwindled. Former Foreign Minister of Ukraine Boris Tarasyuk, the author of this tactic, recalls that: “there were dangers, so I suggested to the Fifth Channel that they install the picture of Maidan at night to keep it in live transmission. So if anything happened, people would be watching, and they would immediately understand what was going on” (Tarasyuk, interview, 2005). The move was, in the words of one Western diplomat, “the ultimate trump card” and sent a clear message: “Come and get us, but if you are going to make us bleed, it will be ‘live on CNN.’” (Western Diplomat, interview, 1 June 2005).⁷

Despite their advantages, large crowds also posed a potential risk for both the Serbian and the Ukrainian movements. Police officers knew they were responsible for public safety and would be held accountable if chaos broke out. Organizers had learned from previous failures that outbreaks of aggression would quickly turn the ire of the security forces against them.⁸ Gene Sharp, one of the seminal theoreticians of nonviolent conflict, has noted that “large numbers unable to maintain nonviolent discipline...may weaken a movement.” On the other hand, he writes, with “necessary standards and discipline they may become irresistible” (Sharp, 1973).

It was critical, therefore, to avoid unnecessarily provocative activities and not repeat previous lapses into violence. Both the Serbian and the Ukrainian movements placed a premium maintaining nonviolent discipline, and organized training programs to prepare volunteers for moments of potential confrontation with police and military officers.

In Ukraine, avoiding provocation was particularly important during Orange Revolution’s three-week mass standoff. In order to avoid altercations between protesters and police or between Yushchenko and Yanukovych supporters, *Pora* and Our Ukraine volunteers formed human “buffer zones” between police and the crowds, and between rival tent camps. Trained volunteers patrolled the tent camps and crowds, looking for and diffusing potential disturbances. Pamphlets were distributed, saying: “Remain unprovoked. We will win. We are strong because we are calm” (Filenko, interview, 2005). All of this seems to have had an impact on the police and military. In a June 2005 interview, one senior law enforcement official noted that “I have a great deal of respect for the fact that the Yushchenko team did all it could to prevent any kind of conflict. They did not look very aggressive... It was amazing” (Senior law enforcement official, interview, 2005). In some cases, this meant restraining more hawkish elements of the political coalition that reportedly “wanted blood” (*Segodnya*, November 21, 2005).

⁷ This individual also cited the absence of live television as a “critical factor” at the Tiananmen Square massacre in China. Similarly, Martin and Varney noted that the “lack of information about massacres for outside audiences” presented an obstacle to generating international support during the East Timorese resistance movement in the 1980s. Conversely, during the successful popular movement in Indonesia to oust military leader General Suharto, demonstrators carried placards stating “Wear your lipstick. You might be on CNN tonight.” (Martin and Varney, 2001 pp. 24, 31).

⁸ One Ukrainian leader noted in June 2005 that “it was extremely important that we never, ever provoked them with aggression. Our actions were very peaceful. We learned the bitter lessons of 2000.” Filenko, interview, 2005.

In fact, the decision to remain nonviolent was an essential element of the strategic calculus made by movement leaders in Serbia and Ukraine. Strategists in the field have long argued that nonviolent methods offer strategic advantage under asymmetric conditions by allowing activists to “oppose the opponent’s power, including his police and military, not with the weapons chosen by him, but by quite different means” (Sharp, 1973). Serbian training programs emphasized this element of the group’s strategy to *Otpor* volunteers in 2000. And a Ukrainian *Pora* coordinator echoed the argument closely, observing that a nonviolent stance allowed the movement to act on “equal terms with the state authorities. If we were not violent, we could compete. If we were violent, they could have resorted to force. This was the only efficient strategy within the current environment” (Zolotaryov, interview, 2005). Domestic and international ramifications of a crackdown against civilians perceived as peaceful would be more severe than one against those that might credibly be labeled as terrorists.⁹

“Breaking the stick”

Ultimately, however, movement leaders recognized that the regimes’ top leaderships might decide that accommodation would be more costly to them than the costs of violent suppression. In Serbia, Milosevic faced devastating political and personal losses if he permitted opposition victory. In Ukraine, although Kuchma was exiting the office, there were oligarchs in his camp who had much to lose from a Yushchenko victory, and little official accountability, making them particularly dangerous.

In both countries, there were attempts to initiate state violence against protesters. In Belgrade, after tear gas failed to disperse crowd during the *Otpor* demonstrations of October 2000, police allegedly received instructions to fire into the throngs. And in Ukraine, although Kuchma was personally unwilling to issue orders for a crackdown during the Orange Revolution, an order emerged from his headquarters at the end of the first week of protests for the mobilization of 10,000 internal police troops surrounding Kiev and distribution of live ammunition (*New York Times*, 17 January 2005). It was thus critical that the movements attempt to erode the effectiveness of the regimes’ repressive instruments that the regimes relied on. As one Western observer of the Orange Revolution succinctly put it, “what do you do if you try to use the stick and it breaks in your hands?” (Senior Western diplomat, interview, May 31 2005).

The armed forces

Authoritarian governments have often relied on the support of their national militaries to “pacify” mass challenges to their rule (Helvey, 2000). In 1989, it was the People’s Liberation Army that blocked the square with tanks and opened fire on students in Tiananmen Square. The preceding year, army units in Burma had suppressed post-referendum uprisings there. More recently, in Uzbekistan, army officers

⁹ One might consider, for example, the blame laid by the Karimov regime on the Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir after the Uzbek Andijan Massacre in May 2004.

and military vehicles were seen alongside police and intelligence services during the bloody Andijan crackdown. (*New York Times*, June 17, 2005).

In Ukraine and Serbia, where the regime leaderships had increasingly invested in the interior police forces at the expense of their militaries, the movements had greater confidence that soldiers might be persuaded to at least remain neutral.¹⁰ Nationwide conscription in both countries meant that a bulk of both armies consisted of relatively young recruits who remained in contact with friends and families and whose political affiliations often mirrored those of their peer civilians. In Ukraine, the campaign worked extensively with families of current military officers in garrison towns to build contacts and assess opinions, recognizing that “family members can be good barometers” (Antonets, interview, 2005). Because of the close ties between the military and broader populations, many of oppositions’ messages to the Serbian and Ukrainian militaries simply reiterated their broader message for the rest of society, emphasizing democratic reform, nationalism, and evolution from a corrupt status quo.

However, some key messages were specifically tailored to individuals in the armed services. In both countries, the conditions of the militaries had worsened in recent years (Kuzio, 2000). Military personnel under Milosevic, in contrast with the once-privileged Tito’s Yugoslav National Army, reportedly felt less valued than their colleagues in the interior police forces. In Ukraine, national budget cuts over the previous fifteen years had left the military with lower pay, less domestic training, and lower morale than their counterparts in the Interior Ministry. (*Financial Times*, November 25, 2004). Estimates showed that more than 80% of officers would describe the living conditions of their families as “below average” or “low” (Grytsenko, 2000). The political oppositions capitalized on these sentiments throughout the course of the presidential campaigns, emphasizing the relative deprivation and proposing measures to address them.¹¹ The Our Ukraine coalition, for example, particularly emphasized issues related to military personnel, such as retirement pay and the rights of families in an attempt to gain votes from Ukrainian servicemen and veterans (Antonets, interview, 2005).

Beyond traditional campaign platforms, the movements also needed to address issues of strategic significance to the extra-legal power struggle emerging in both countries. In postwar Serbia, the backdrop of NATO bombing campaign was a salient feature of Milosevic’s efforts to discredit the opposition. *Otpor* was concerned that the regime, recognizing the military’s sensitivity to the issue, might couch repressive orders in a portrayal of protesters as a violent mercenaries preparing ground for NATO invasion.

Because of this possibility, messages to the military emphasized that the opposition was not a “fifth column” and appealed to the army to serve the Serbian people,

¹⁰ In Ukraine, close contacts and training programs between the Ukrainian army and NATO’s Partnership for Peace program and the US International Military Education and Training (IMET) program may well have contributed to pro-democracy sentiments within the armed forces.

¹¹ For example, retired colonel Dragan Vuksic said in April 2000: “Slobodan Milosevic...preferred the police, thinking that it could solve all his problems. However in Kosovo he realized that it couldn’t... He wasn’t confident in the Yugoslav Army. Then he made some personal changes... placed loyal officers in charge, who then conducted appropriate purges. Now he prefers the Army.” (*Vreme* weekly, April 22, 2000).

rather than the ruling party.¹² In order to counter the regime's mounting accusations of treason, *Otpor* openly condemned the NATO bombing campaign, always underscoring Milosevic's responsibility for it. For instance, on March 22, 2000, *Otpor* commemorated the anniversary of the start of the bombing with posters reading "Resistance to NATO Aggression." They also undermined Milosevic's nationalist base by inviting Army reservists who had fought in the war to speak at rallies and marches condemning Milosevic for "betraying Kosovo."

The fact that the political leadership of the Serbian opposition coalition included two retired generals—one of whom was General Momcilo Perisic, who had served as the Serbian army Chief of Staff between 1992 and 1998—boosted *Otpor's* credibility.¹³ However, despite these connections, the opposition never established communication with the Army generals, and never received any guarantees that the military would not intervene in the case of a mass protest.¹⁴ In the end, although the Serbian army mobilized troops into the outskirts of Belgrade, there was never a serious attempt to reach the city centre.¹⁵

In Ukraine, opposition elites made direct communication with military officers a central—if covert—objective. Their efforts began in December 2002, when the retired chief of the Ukrainian air force, General Volodymyr Antonets, joined the opposition after reluctantly ending his military career.¹⁶ Antonets created volunteer teams of former colleagues who worked specifically on reaching out to state security forces. Because they were retired officers, it was relatively easy for Antonets' team to make contact with mid-ranking Ukrainian military officers, families, and fellow veterans. From regional teams throughout Ukraine, each member was "secretly building contacts on his level, and passing the information on" to General Antonets (Antonets, interview, 2005).

¹² This approach was also used in Ukraine, where "Military is with the people" was a common chant for protesters. The statements also echoed those shouted by Russian citizens defying tanks during the 1991 coup. (Ackerman and Duvall, 2000, p. 14).

¹³ General Momcilo Perisic, explaining his decision to become a politician, said: "Yugoslav Army is not the army of the ruling party. It is the institution of the state that protects interests of citizens and fatherland... This is why I decided to become politically active—to prevent the abuse of the Army" (*Nezavisna Svetlost* magazine, 8 July 2000).

¹⁴ Zoran Djindjic later said: "Although generals Perisic and Obradovic [opposition leaders] have tried, we haven't managed to find out what was the real mood in the Army, not even few days before October 5th." (*Vreme* magazine, 2 November 2000).

¹⁵ One of this article's authors, Ivan Marovic, was drafted into the Army on September 9th, two weeks before the elections. By the end of the day on October 5th all officers in his unit disappeared. In the evening soldiers were debating what to do: some said "we should drop our weapons and go to Belgrade to join the protest," others said "we should keep our weapons and join the protest." The next morning the officers announced that the new government came to power and that the Army would stay out of politics. Before this, one of the petty-officers approached Marovic, shook his hand and said: "Congratulations, you won." This is how the author discovered that Milosevic was finished.

¹⁶ Antonets had retired from the army in 1999, after being relocated by Kuchma to "such a position that I could never have accepted." He and Kuchma had fallen out over the sale of Ukrainian military aircraft to commercial airlines.

In October 2004, “foreseeing that Kuchma’s administration would never surrender without fighting, and realizing that they were able to use arms,” the team shifted the nature of their work to actively prepare for the upcoming struggle. The contacts that had been building for the previous eighteen months and pre-existing friendships were called into play. According to Antonets:

My people had their own friends, contacts... many who directly were commanders of military sub-units. For us it was important to start the movement from the bottom up, so that the leadership would understand that it would not be possible to fulfill the orders of Kuchma, because at the lower levels, they would not support orders to use arms. (Antonets, interview, 2005)

Indeed, it was at the “middle and upper-middle” ranks of the Ukrainian armed services that a crucial “series of informal agreements” was struck. As a result of these negotiations, mid-level officers agreed that they would not use force to suppress protesters under any circumstances. In the event that the regime attempted to use police or special forces to initiate violent tactics against civilians, army units would intervene—physically if necessary—and mediate.

On the night of November 28, when the Interior Ministry special forces units outside Kiev received mobilization orders, these agreements came into play. The Our Ukraine leadership was notified soon after the mobilization by sympathetic individuals in the special forces. (Senior Our Ukraine coordinator, interview, 2005) Within an hour, they had contacted Western embassies and the Chief of Staff of the army, General Olexander Petruk, called the Interior Ministry with a threat to place unarmed Ukrainian soldiers between the Interior Ministry troops and protesters (*Ukrayinska Pravda* April 20, 2005). A Western diplomat involved in the flurry of calls to attempt to deter the interior ministry recalled that he “went to bed thinking that we had made the difference. But in the morning I heard about the call that had been made from the head of the army. The call from the army was the more critical element” (Senior Western Diplomat, interview, 7 June 2005).

Local police

In both Serbia and Ukraine, highly politicized police forces posed a more serious threat to the movements’ activities than did the national militaries. As professionalized bodies with constitutional mandates to protect public order, their identities were more closely linked to the regimes in power. In May 2004, for example, Ukrainian Interior Ministry head Mykola Bilokon reportedly declared during a meeting with his regional subordinates that although “we are told that the *milizia* should be beyond politics,” as “the armed governmental body...it is understandable that we should support the government... We will win in the first round of the elections—and we will drink for three days then!” (Committee of Voters of Ukraine, May 2004) According to one Ukrainian interior ministry officer, prior to the elections, “there were actual orders to vote for [government candidate Victor] Yanukovych.” (Kiev-based Interior Ministry officer, interview, 2005). In Serbia, Milosevic had

deployed local police to Kosovo in 1999, and once they returned, had successfully ordered them to suppress *Otpor* demonstrations with excessive uses of force.

Part of the support for government leadership at the lower ranks lay in the heavy indoctrination techniques employed by the regime. In Ukraine video tapes had “appeared” in many major police stations during the election campaign, ostensibly documenting the opposition’s violent contempt for the police and desire to “destroy” pro-Kuchma candidate Yanukovych.¹⁷ One journalist who watched the tape compared it to the infamous “two minutes of hate” in George Orwell’s *1984* (Fifth Channel journalist, interview, 2005). In both countries, government representatives attempted to discredit student activists by publicly portraying them as “terrorists” or “drug addicts” (Zolotariov, interview, 2005).

For both movements, therefore, the need to undermine regime credibility and convince law enforcement agencies of their legitimacy was imperative to their cause. In *Otpor*, a stylistic decision was made to adopt the logo of clenched fist and black T-shirts. The goal was to look dangerous but remain nonviolent in order to deceive high-ranking government officials while providing the correct information to police officers.¹⁸ *Otpor* strategists recognized that if the government thought that *Otpor* was a revolutionary organization, the regime would send police to arrest members of the organization.¹⁹ However, because *Otpor* was strictly nonviolent and advocated elections as a legitimate tool for change, police officers would receive different information during interrogations than expected and, *Otpor* hoped, begin to question the motives of the government.

The strategy was largely successful. Arrests of *Otpor* activists increased as the organization expanded and the accusations of the regime became less credible, especially after May 2, 2000, when three *Otpor* activists were heavily beaten in Milosevic’s home town of Pozarevac by friends of Milosevic’s son Marko, and then arrested by the police and charged for an attempted murder. After the May 13 murder of a Socialist party official in Novi Sad, the regime exploited the event to accuse *Otpor* as a terrorist organization responsible for the death.²⁰ An intensified

¹⁷ The tapes were released to the Fifth Channel by a police officer and thereafter shown on the station which who “tried to show that they were attempting to brainwash, to manipulate the police.” Fifth Channel journalist, interview, 2005.

¹⁸ *Otpor* hoped that this iconography would especially irritate Mirjana Markovic, Milosevic’s wife and leader of the Yugoslav Left. Press releases issued by the Yugoslav Left soon showed that the impact of *Otpor*’s iconography exceeded all expectations. Indeed, one classified document issued by the Analytics Directorate resembled press releases issued by the Yugoslav Left: “...with their dressing style (black caps and scarves, trousers and black T-shirts) members of this organization resemble dark past and Nazi ideology which brought this nation huge suffering and evil.” (“Information on illegal activities of the fascist-terrorist organization *Otpor*”, Analytics Directorate, Ministry of Interior, Belgrade, June 7, 2000).

¹⁹ General Vlastimir Djordjevic, Head of the Public Security Sector, Assistant Minister of Interior ordered the police to “identify members of ‘*Otpor*’, collect data on their numbers, intentions and affiliations, their movements and other activities...and send all information to the Police Directorate.” (Instruction 33/2000 issued on May 11th 2000 by general Vlastimir Djordjevic, Ministry of Interior).

²⁰ Most sources reporting on this event have concluded that the murder was the result of a domestic dispute.

crackdown on *Otpor* followed, and in the next few months thousands of *Otpor* activists were randomly picked and detained. Perhaps ironically, this activity facilitated communications between *Otpor* and the police.²¹ By the time elections were held on September 24, members of the Serbian police, except high ranking officers, knew more about *Otpor*, its goals and methods than ordinary citizens. *Otpor*, in turn, was getting information about the mood in the police after each arrest and detention.

The Ukrainian civil society movement, *Pora*, also leveraged arrests to communicate with members of the police forces, though on a smaller scale than their Serbian counterparts. Over the summer, student activists had been arrested and interrogated during rallies and after distributing opposition stickers and newsletters (*Kiev Interfax*, August 5, 2004). In October, the regime detained and interrogated over 150 activists and instigated fifteen criminal cases against *Pora* members on terrorist charges. Each of these arrests served as an opportunity to communicate with police officers (Kaskiv, interview, 2005).²² *Pora* activists also visited police stations throughout Ukraine, giving policemen flowers and distributing letters, and asking officers to abide by the law (Senior Our Ukraine coordinator, interview, 2005).

Several factors worked in favor of the organizations' strategies. Because they were composed largely of mainstream youths, government charges of terrorism seemed less credible. The maintenance of strict nonviolent discipline by the youths—a rule internally enforced within the organizations—strengthened this discord. Both organizations employed humor to press this point: *Otpor* publicly presented members in their early teens as “model” terrorists, while *Pora* activists demonstrated with lemons when accused of stockpiling grenades (*Interfax* Ukraine November 28, 2004). For more on the use of humor by youth NGOs, see Kuzio in this issue). Finally, loose organizational structures, paired with an emphasis on local initiatives, meant that acts of protest could emerge simultaneously nationwide in preparation for the final struggle, making it impossible for the regime to send their most loyal and most brutal units to counter them.

Otpor and *Pora* responded quickly to arrests when they did occur. Both groups set up hotlines to quickly inform local networks of support and media sources of arrests, and immediately rallied groups of protesters to challenge local police stations. As a result, those detained were often released within hours, inspiring new activists to risk arrest.²³ In Ukraine, *Pora* called upon “special groups” of opposition

²¹ Humanitarian Law Fund from Belgrade reported that between May 2nd and September 24th more than 2000 *Otpor* activists were detained, together with some 400 members of opposition parties and around 100 activists of nongovernmental organizations. Some 300 *Otpor* activists were detained five or more times. Ten percent of the detainees (some 200) were under 18 years of age (taken from “Police Crackdown on *Otpor*—Serbia, 2 May to 24 September 2000”, Humanitarian Law Fund report, Belgrade, November 23, 2001).

²² The October 2004 raids also included agents of the SBU, Ukraine's domestic intelligence agency.

²³ This strategy would have been more difficult to implement had torture been a more pervasive element of police interrogation. In Serbia, less than 1% of the detainees were subject to torture. The most brutal case was in Vladicin Han in south Serbia where police tortured seven *Otpor* activists for three hours. They were saved by 300 citizens that gathered in front of the police station to demand their release.

parliamentarians and ombudsmen to “seriously limit the possibilities of investigations” (Kaskiv, interview, 2005).

Such rapid responses by local populations also served as deterrents to the use of force. On October 4, for example, hundreds of police were sent to repress workers at the Kolubara coal mines, where 7000 miners had been on strike since September 29 (*New York Times*, October 5, 2000). These mines were essential to Serbia’s electricity production, and the strike threatened to impose severe blackouts. As police approached the mines, miners began telephoning people from nearby towns and villages, who quickly came to the site to defend them. The police ultimately ignored orders to disperse the crowd.

In both Serbia and Ukraine, political elites worked to broker tacit agreements with individuals in the police forces. Before any event, for example, Ukrainian parliamentarians Volodomor Filenko and Taras Stetskiiv prepared a “special plan for preparation and conduct.” In addition to applying for city permits prior to Our Ukraine’s mass events, they would also send out formal letters to the appropriate people in the local police stations. These letters, they say, provided them with “an excuse for a meeting so that we could feel their moods, and know what to expect” (Stetskiiv, interview, 2005). In Kiev, particular care was taken to connect with the city council and police staff subordinate to it. By the time of the Orange Revolution and after multiple discussions with Our Ukraine leaders, Kiev mayor Oleksander Omelchenko offered the full cooperation of the Kiev police, who serve under dual command of the city government and the Interior Ministry (Senior Our Ukraine coordinator, interview, 2005).

In his meetings with law enforcement officials, coordinator Stetskiiv recalls emphasizing both the probability of an opposition victory and the fact that Our Ukraine was observing their actions:

Those with whom we spoke, we told them: “Dear people, Kuchma will never win. And Yanukovych will not win, because the people are with Yushchenko. And we ask you not to violate the law, because you will be brought to responsibility.” We repeated this like a prayer. We won the propaganda war, and we made them hesitate, made them have some doubts that Kuchma would be able to win. This is very important, when your enemy is not sure, but you *are* sure. You have all the advantages. (Stetskiiv, interview, 2005)

During these meetings, according to Stetskiiv, “It took major efforts and a long time to convince them that the old power would fall away—that it would not stay. But in any case, this was the message that it was important to send” (Stetskiiv, interview, 2005). Their success in this effort was contingent upon the amount of popular support that the opposition was able to generate. Volodymyr Filenko recalls that contacts between the police and opposition “produced no result before the people went out in the streets. Once people went out, those contacts finally gave us some results.... Without so many people in the streets there could have been no negotiations or agreements. It was the

background against which such meetings could take place” (Filenko, interview, 2005).²⁴

In Serbia, quiet and intensive communication took place between police commanders and political opposition leaders during the ten days between the September 25 election results and October 5. During that period, some police commanders openly stated that they would not act against protesters, but these individuals were immediately fired.²⁵ Zoran Djindjic later said that “...in the meeting on the night between Wednesday and Thursday [October 4 and 5] many police commanders decided not to intervene. We had that information... They told us: we will receive orders, but don’t worry, we will not execute them. And this is exactly what happened.”²⁶

The Ukrainian intelligence services

Since November 2004, there has been considerable discussion as to the influence of the Ukrainian intelligence agency, *Sluzhba Bespeky Ukrayiny*, (SBU) on the success of Orange Revolution. (See *New York Times*, 17 January 2005 and *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, 24 January 2005 for details on this debate). Although many sources argue that the military’s stance was a more decisive factor than the SBU in deterring bloodshed, it is worthwhile to examine the breakdown in loyalties in this institution as well.

Throughout the campaign, the intentions of the opaque service were often difficult to assess. When the Our Ukraine political coalition headquarters were first established in Kiev in 2002, many law enforcement agencies, including the SBU began watching them carefully (Filenko, interview, 2005). In October 2004, plainclothes SBU agents ransacked several election-oriented NGO offices and personal residences, confiscating documents including records of voter lists and campaign finance sources. (*Ukrayinska Pravda*, October 23, 2004).

Loyalties within the SBU were divided from the beginning. An observer familiar with the institution described the dynamics:

²⁴ Filenko, V., 2005. Interview with A. Binnendijk June 10, 2005. Kiev. [Cassette Recording in Possession of Author.] A similar comment was made independently by another Our Ukraine staffer: “On several occasions, Yushchenko asked military and police officers not to obey illegal orders, but until people actually went to the streets, there were no signs of advancement, or of making them Yushchenko supporters.” (Burkovsky, interview, 2005).

²⁵ “Commander of Special Antiterrorist Unit SAJ, colonel Zivko Trajkovic was dismissed...last Thursday [September 28, 2000] and without explanation reassigned to Kursumlija [small town in south Serbia].” (*Glas Javnosti* October 2, 2000).

²⁶ Djindjic also said: “At midnight we found out that four-five commanders of police brigades, people who had thousands of policemen under control, were informed by Vlajko Stojiljkovic [Minister of Interior] that the next day [October 5th] force would be used. Not just firearms, but explosives too, in order to prevent convoys from coming to Belgrade. And that Milosevic had given the order to defend the government at any cost. This was all stopped at the very top of the chain of command by some generals, and we were in contact with them that night. We didn’t believe them fully, but we made the strategy based on this information, nevertheless.” (*Vreme* magazine, November 2, 2000).

The reality was that the security services of Ukraine were split into three parts. One was pro-Yanukovych. A second part of the SBU was trying to share information with the opposition, while the third part was idle. The fact that the SBU was not united was another advantage for the revolution. (Fifth Channel journalist, interview, 2005)

Throughout the campaign, the opposition and elements of the SBU cultivated unofficial lines of communication. Many of those in the Our Ukraine camp had elite connections within the domestic intelligence agency prior to the campaign: SBU head General Ihor Smeshko dates many of his relationships with the opposition leaders to 1992, when he served as Ukraine's first defense attaché in Washington DC (Smeshko, interview, 2005). Smeshko remains a controversial figure in the history of the Orange Revolution. A late-night meeting between opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko, General Smeshko and other high-ranking SBU officials in early September—now notorious because of its potential connection to Yushchenko's poisoning—was held to discuss, in the words of Smeshko, “the SBU's participation or nonparticipation in the presidential elections.” Yushchenko, concerned about “improper behavior” during the elections by government agencies, said afterwards of the meeting that “I wanted to impress on the head of the SBU that the law should prevail in his domain” (*Ukrayinska Pravda*, October 2, 2004).

At the helm of the organization, Smeshko viewed the SBU as a “balancer” in the political power struggle waging in Ukraine, but did not hide his personal distaste for candidate Yanukovych's criminal past (Smeshko, interview, 2005). In summer 2004, he had assigned an SBU general as secret liaison with Our Ukraine chief of staff Oleg Rybachuk, who would receive regular informational updates throughout fall 2004 from contacts in the security services. Rybachuk was also offered documents from the Yanukovych headquarters indicating their intent to engage in election fraud, which he later used in Our Ukraine campaign materials (*Eurasia Daily Monitor*, January 14, 2005) (Kuzio, 2005a,b).

When Yushchenko met with Smeshko on November 24 to request personal security, the SBU chief assigned him eight specialists from the elite “Alpha” counterterrorism unit, and agreed to contact former SBU agents to help guard members of the campaign. It was agreed, however, that the SBU would maintain its neutral stance as to the outcome of the political process (*New York Times*, 17 January, 2005).

When special forces troops were mobilized on the night of November 28, the SBU played an active role in contacting the principal actors. According to Our Ukraine sources, Smeshko made calls to the general prosecutor, the interior minister, and the head of Kiev police telling them to call off the troops (*Agence France Presse*, February 15, 2005). There are unverified reports that Alpha special forces troops were armed and prepared to meet the interior forces as they marched into Kiev (Fifth Channel reporter, interview, 2005). To one Our Ukraine insider, who had been coordinating with the SBU to maintain order on the Maidan, the institution's support was not taken for granted and came as a relief. General Antonets recalled that “as for SBU—their people worked around Maidan—they knew the situation, and they could make their own decisions. At the most difficult period, we got the information that they would be on the side of Maidan” (Antonets, interview, 2004).

Looking back on his role in the events of the Orange Revolution, General Smeshko maintains that his primary objective was the prevention of bloodshed, and potentially, of civil war (Smeshko, interview, 2005). Other participants and observers of the events argue that the opposition's potential for victory played a key role, claiming that: "SBU officers cooperated with both camps because they wanted to be on good terms with whoever won" (Fifth Channel reporter, interview, 2005). Similarly, Yulia Tymoshenko commented that "this was a very complicated game," and felt that SBU officials, including General Smeshko, "merely hedged their bets," in the words of the *New York Times* reporter who interviewed her (*New York Times*, January 17, 2005). It is likely that both moral and pragmatic considerations came into play in influencing individual decision-making within the organization.

Special forces: a "rock paper scissors" dynamic

There were elements in both countries' security forces that were potentially immune of the efforts of the nonviolent movements to persuade them not to act violently against protesters. In these situations deterrence, rather than persuasion, was the primary goal of the movements.

In Ukraine, the special forces units of the Interior Ministry, trucked to Kiev and the surrounding region from the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, posed a particular threat to protesters.²⁷ Cut off from most information sources, the lower and mid-level ranks lived in barracks and were trained in walled camps. The Our Ukraine team had little contact with members of the Crimean Territorial Command (an Interior Ministry unit that had been temporarily redeployed to the Kiev region) or with members of the Interior Ministry special forces that were increasingly spotted within the city (Antonets, interview, 2005). Within Kiev, these forces stood behind local, unarmed Berkut (riot) police at the entrance of the Presidential Administration headquarters, with orders to shoot should the opposition storm the building (Burkovsky, interview, 2005). Interior Ministry special forces snipers were stationed at various spots around the square (Antonets, interview, 2005).²⁸ Outside the city, many more Interior Ministry troops were housed in barracks with little access to external news sources. Opposition leaders charged with developing security contacts had had considerable difficulty initiating communication with these units, and so could not predict with great accuracy what they would do if given the order to crack down (Antonets, interview, 2005). Altogether, observers predict, over 15,000 Interior Ministry troops assembled in or near Kiev over the first week of the Revolution

²⁷ The BARS special forces of the Interior Ministry, and others, were former units of the National Guard, disbanded in 1999. The Crimean detachments of the National Guard were considered the most effective, and became BARS. The placement of Crimean BARS in Kyiv led to rumors of Russian spetsnaz in Kiev. On these different security units see Kuzio, T. The Non-Military Security Forces of Ukraine. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol.13, no.4 (December 2000), pp. 29–56.

²⁸ According to Antonets, the Omega Sniper Unit of the BARS special forces brigade were active on the rooftops above the Maidan.

(Western diplomat, interview, 3 June 2005). In the night of November 28, a week into the protests, it was these troops that were mobilized and issued live ammunition.

In Serbia, too, both the military and the Interior Ministry had elite special forces under their command that were well paid, trained and equipped and isolated from the population. One of these special units, the “Red Berets” Unit for Special Operations, (“JSO”), implicated in war crimes in Bosnia and reputedly tied to organized crime, was of particular concern. Operating as a part of the *Sluzba drzavne bezbednosti* (SBD) the group was responsible for number of assassinations, including the murder of Milosevic’s predecessor, former president Ivan Stambolic, who was kidnapped and killed on August 25, 2000, just few weeks before presidential elections.²⁹

Two major factors played into the opposition movements’ deterrence strategies. The first was the relative number of protesters to the forces available. In Serbia, although *Otpor* was unsure as to how JSO would react to mass protests, one thing remained certain: with one million people in Belgrade it would be impossible for them to disperse the crowd without firing upon them, since they had roughly 300 men under arms. In Ukraine, too, according to one source present at the time, an understanding that the Interior Ministry “had too few human resources and material to peacefully make the crowds leave the Maidan” was evident to both the special forces commanders and to the leaders of the other services (Fifth Channel reporter, interview, 2005).³⁰

A second crucial issue was that of checks and balances between the various services. In Ukraine, one observer noted that the Interior Ministry’s special forces were acutely aware of what he terms a “rock-paper-scissors” scenario, in which “the Interior Ministry beats protesters, and the military beats the Interior Ministry” (Senior Western diplomat, interview, 2005).³¹ This dynamic was probably most overt on November 28, when as explained earlier, frictions between the military, the SBU, and the Interior Ministry created hesitation in those otherwise loyal to the regime. In 2000, Serbian *Otpor* organizers also knew that even if their messages did not reach those in the special forces, it had become increasingly evident that the majority of the armed forces were unwilling to defend the regime against the unarmed protesters. The hope, therefore, was that commanders of these units would realize that they could do nothing to stop the protest.³² In the backdrop of both scenarios lay the Romanian regime change

²⁹ JSO was later held responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic who was killed in March 2003 in front of the building of the Serbian Government in Belgrade. Thereafter, the unit was outlawed and its commanders arrested.

³⁰ Although water cannons were stationed near the Maidan and Presidential Administration building, it was not certain that this would be an effective mechanism against such large crowds.

³¹ The diplomat was referring to the children’s game “rock-paper-scissors”, in which “rock” beats “scissors”, “paper” beats “rock,” etc.

³² Zvonimir Trajkovic, Milosevic’s advisor between 1990 and 1993, said earlier, in May 2000: “I’m confident that civil war in Serbia is impossible because there is no other side—Milosevic’s side...Army is not the top, Chief of Staff and few generals. Army is the captains and they will not shoot at their own people, nor will the police intervene with all their might or shoot at the people. They [the regime] often send groups of extreme policemen that are willing to do these things. But when the critical mass shows up in the streets, police will not intervene. Technically it will be impossible for them to intervene.” (*Danas* weekend edition, May 13, 2000).

of 1989, when internal security forces attempted to crush protests against Nicolae Ceausescu, and ultimately clashed with army troops, who supported the protesters. Splintering between institutions thus significantly altered the cost-benefit analyses for those elements of the security forces willing to stay loyal to the regimes.

Conclusion

Strategic attention to state security forces may serve three major functions of force on the battlefield of a nonviolent struggle: defense, deterrence and compellent. Defensively, it may mute the impact of a regime's violent weapons against the movement and its allies (Ackerman and Krueger, 1994). As the costs of repression mount and capacity to suppress opposition diminishes, the regime leadership may be deterred from attempting to wield coercive force at all (Dahl, 1971). Finally, by weakening one of the regime's core centers of gravity, a movement may compel it into actions that it would otherwise avoid, such as internationally mediated negotiations, new election standards, or even removal from office.

Although varying structural features of any given struggle prohibit formulaic tactical generalizations, some common themes might be drawn from the Ukrainian and Serbian cases. First, the movements were able to successfully raise the stakes of repression for individuals throughout the security forces' chains of command: in these cases through the massing of large crowds, leveraging of international attention, or unofficial media coverage. Second, each movement demonstrated broad-based popular support for its political objectives, which both indicated their potential for success and swayed individuals in the lower police and military ranks who had less at stake in the survival of the regime but were closely tied to their families and local communities. Third, through self-policing and maintenance of nonviolent discipline, both movements minimized unnecessary confrontations with security forces and belied regime attempts to depict them as "terrorist" organizations. Despite widespread expectations that the regimes were unlikely to cede power without bloodshed, together these efforts contributed to political transitions free from the destruction of violence.

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