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# REVOLUTION RECONSIDERED

*Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr.*

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In the winter of 2006 Georgians and Ukrainians will be marking, and many celebrating, events that they have labeled by the somewhat old-fashioned term, “revolution”: the Rose and Orange Revolutions. It is surprising that these historic upheavals have not spurred any reconsideration of the once popular concept of revolution. Modern liberal democracy as we know it today emerged when a “right of revolution” began to be widely asserted in the century leading up to the American Declaration of Independence in 1776. Over the next two centuries, revolution was a hope always cherished somewhere on the globe, consoling believers in popular rule and guiding their efforts. Some of the subsequent revolutions were amazing successes, like the American, while others turned out to be cruel deceptions. Partly because the last wave of revolutionary enthusiasm after the Second World War had proved deceptive, the collapse of communist rule in the Soviet bloc was accompanied by a feeling that revolutions might be dying out. The recent “color revolutions” in the former Soviet Union give us an opportunity to ask ourselves whether this is so, and whether revolution is a good or bad idea overall.

Revolution in the strict sense (what we may call “classical revolution”) has a number of essential features. First, there is a public discrediting of the old order, which leads to a quick change of the ruling body—the class or group of people (rich people, the people as a whole, communists, mullahs) that participates politically and therefore rules. Second, it involves a quick change of the ruling group in the name of, but also by means of, the whole community as represented by its majority. Third, the new rulers are specified and legitimized by a body of

doctrine or ideology. Fourth, it installs a new system that is created by the state: The characteristic tendency of revolutions is to seize control of the state and to use the state to produce wider changes. Fifth, in revolutions the new rulers and institutions take power by violence or by the threat of violence.

Three elements of this definition deserve to be underscored: 1) A revolution must be fairly brief and well demarcated from the periods before and after in order to differentiate it from a process of gradual reform. 2) Moreover, it must be achieved not only by leaders but by the energies of a broader group of people. Rulers sometimes may relax and broaden their rule, often doing so under some form of pressure, and leaders of coups d'état may proclaim their desire to create a democratic system (as in Mauritania in August 2005), but these are not revolutions in the traditional sense. Because a wide group of people participate in carrying out a revolution, they can take pride in what they accomplish. 3) Finally, violence has been quite important to revolutions. This conclusion was powerfully restated by Simon Schama on the two-hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution: "The Terror was merely 1789 with a higher body count. From the first year it was apparent that violence was not just an unfortunate side effect . . . it was the Revolution's source of collective energy."<sup>1</sup>

There is a case for violence. Outside the Muslim world, modern man is no longer attracted by revolutionary violence (or by war). As we will discuss, such violence holds great dangers for democratic transformation. But to appreciate the case for classical revolution it is essential to examine the function of violence in past democratic revolutions. Violence heightens the drama of political change, vividly defining friends and enemies. It creates examples—tragic, heroic, and villainous—on the basis of which citizens remodel their characters. One should picture here revolutionary icons such as Jacques-Louis David's 1793 painting *The Death of Marat*. If we ask how passive victims of politics become the owners and operators of politics, these images and stories of revolutionary violence, heroism, and sacrifice must play a great role. It is not clear whether nonviolent substitutes for revolutionary symbolism are as memorable as those that recall violent clashes. In any case, nonviolence relies for its symbolism on the violence of the regimes it opposes, and offers few clues to the character of the nonviolent world to which it aspires.

Violence creates a clear dividing line between the past and the future. We have become accustomed to the fact that Japan, Germany, and Italy are democracies, but this is one of the most astonishing facts of modern history. It surely has something to do with the long frenzy of violence during the Second World War, which not only created bad associations with the past, but also substituted for revolutionary violence by creating a very clear dividing line between past and future.

Postcommunist Russia, in contrast, is caught in a gray, indeterminate state that hoists and honors both the red flag and the imperial tricolor, a state neither communist nor anticommunist.

## The Case Against Revolution

There is a powerful case against revolution, obscured in the last century because it was best articulated by older philosophic historians such as Thucydides, David Hume, Hippolyte Taine, and François Guizot. These thinkers perceived the concrete problems that arise from revolution in a way which is more thoughtful and truer than the analyses offered by contemporary social science. To begin with, many of these writers argued that revolution disrupts the respect for institutions and the obedience to law that derive from habit. A wonderful statement of Thomas Babington Macaulay in his *History of England* serves as a text for understanding much about revolution, both its positive and negative aspects: "In revolutions men live fast. The experience of years is crowded into hours; old habits of thought and action are violently broken."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to say that revolution's "own principle is that rebellion may be justifiable. Its own existence proves that revolution may be successful."<sup>3</sup> So revolution can easily issue in a process of endless innovation, both inconclusive and exhausting. As Hume put it in his own earlier *History of England*, "every successive revolution became a precedent for that which followed it."<sup>4</sup> Our contemporary Charles Tilly concludes that France "went through four somewhat separate revolutions between 1789 and 1799."<sup>5</sup>

One can wind up with a situation where, again according to Macaulay, "the whole political world was without form and void—an incessant whirl of hostile atoms which every moment forms some new combination."<sup>6</sup> That is, politicians cannot appeal to any stable parties, constituencies, or interests to gain power, nor can they have access to predictable and effective levers of power if they temporarily gain control of the state. This was the sad reality of Russian politics during the 1990s. We hardly ever mention the names of our former democratic heroes (Gavriil Popov, Sergei Stankevych, Anatoly Sobchak, Oleg Rumyantsev, and others). We were enchanted with these people, but then dropped them at a certain point without explaining why. What happened to them? Many simply disappeared from sight; others, sadly, turned into opportunists or thieves. A big part of the explanation of why they changed is that the political environment was so random, and the footing of these politicians so slippery, that they tended to give up politics or to go with every wind. Revolutions also tend to bring to power people who are not experienced in exploiting the political resources that are available (for example, Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia and Abulfaz Elchibey in Azerbaijan). The modern state consists almost entirely of a structure of

habits and expectations that certain officials will obey other officials and that official acts will have certain results. These habits and expectations are disrupted by revolution.

Revolutions do stir enthusiasm, creating huge hopes and inevitable disappointment. Thus they are a fluctuating and fragile basis for government. As Hume puts it, “it is the nature of passion gradually to decay, while the sense of interest maintains a permanent influence and authority.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, interest is a better basis for political institutions than enthusiasm. Enthusiasm can easily lead to more and more extreme political positions and to competing extremisms—the story of many revolutions. Once the enthusiasm cools, the disappointment can easily issue in political cynicism. In modern societies, politics is rarely the preoccupation of the whole society. After extremist politics emerges, even most of the revolutionaries themselves gradually withdraw from the political scene. One Jacobin legislator complained that after a few years, “Instead of seeing the friends of the Revolution increase as we have advanced on the revolutionary path . . . we see our ranks thinning out and the early supporters of liberty deserting our cause.”<sup>8</sup> Taine adds that rulers as a result can feel as if they are in a vacuum, with public spirit very weak and social solidarity lacking.

This is the root of the paranoia seen in many revolutions: Leaders become desperate because they know that they really do not have any support. In the end, and often sooner, rulers discover their self-interest. The Directory (the small group that held power in France from 1795 to 1799) consisted of former Jacobins, who, after the revolution had worn itself out, were primarily interested in holding on to their money and positions.<sup>9</sup> This also helps to explain post-Soviet kleptocracy. Finally, it is tempting to reach for force to fill the void left by evaporating revolutionary enthusiasm. Coercion culminates in the emergence of a dictator, like Cromwell, Robespierre, Napoleon, or Lenin. It is a process that has recurred with discouraging frequency.

Revolutions ultimately cannot be legal or constitutional because a revolution is a change of regime, and the laws derive from the regime. The Rose and Orange Revolutions involved the judicial invalidation of fraudulent elections, but these decisions would not have been made without the outpouring of citizens into the streets. In fact, the kinship of classical revolutions with violence has echoes even in the peaceful “color revolutions.” Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili was the hero of the nonviolent Rose Revolution, but during the 2005 celebrations of that revolution’s second anniversary he showed a film about what happened in Zugdidi, the only place where there was violence: Mysterious men in masks shot at demonstrators, wounding two people and killing another. At the celebration, Saakashvili, who has a keen sense of the power of revolutionary symbolism, produced a woman who had bravely pulled down the mask of one of the anonymous marksmen.

Saakashvili understands well the revolutionary need for heroes and villains—a need that sits uneasily with his own principle of nonviolence.

When revolutionary movements come to power, they embody an explosive paradox. Their prestige is bound up with revolutionary ideas, symbols, and motives, yet they must endure as stable governments. Inevitably, rulers are tempted to find a way to recover the mood of revolution while governing. One such means is terror, which re-creates the revolutionary division of society into friends and enemies and the excitement of violence, but can be employed by governments. Stalin undertook a “second revolution,” and Mao Zedong even more obviously tried to restore the period of the popular seizure of power in calling for a “cultural revolution.” To the indictment of revolution we must add the way in which it encourages that ersatz revolution, terror. Revolution is like a stone thrown into a small pond, a phenomenon with vast secondary consequences.

Revolution is an idea that legitimizes unconstitutional and often violent paths to power. It is a gift to ambitious and greedy men, who can disguise their coups d'état as popular revolutions. Surveying history, one gets an impression that such misuse of revolution became more common over time, particularly after revolution was translated out of Europe (and the places colonized by European settlers), where it had deeper social and ideological roots.

In other words, there was a gradual corruption of the revolutionary tradition. In 1911, for example, a Chinese revolution toppled the Manchu Dynasty. It would not have succeeded without the commander of the new European-model army, Yuan Shikai. The meaning of Yuan Shikai's adherence to the revolution became clearer in 1915 when he tried to make himself emperor and found a new dynasty. By the 1990s, movements that expressed purely the ambitions of their leaders and a desire for plunder, such as the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, were wrapping themselves in the flag of revolution. How many unscrupulous and violent men have been empowered by the revolutionary ideal!

Finally, the strangest assumption of the Western revolutionary tradition is the belief that oppression, a bad situation that damages human nature and its potential, is the necessary prelude to the best situation. That is explicitly true in Marxist doctrine, where the increasing misery of the proletariat must precede revolutionary regeneration, but it is implicitly true of all revolutions, in that all attempt to show that they are a reaction to oppression. Yet it is not obvious why the worst should give birth to the best. If you want to raise a good dog or horse, you do not begin by beating or starving it. There is something very strange about the assumption that great oppression and misery engender human rebirth. Perhaps this revolutionary assumption is rooted in the sequence of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, itself originally felt to be a huge paradox.

Revolutions, as defined above, appeared at a certain period in his-

tory and a certain place (most scholars would say in early-modern Europe). In classical antiquity there were many preconditions for revolution—bitter class conflict, sudden changes of regime, and the identification of the contending sides with philosophic positions (Socratic philosophy with oligarchy, or Stoicism with opposition to the Roman emperors)—but no revolutions came about. This curious historical fact prompts the question of whether revolutions could also disappear at another point. That question is sharpened by the way in which communist rule collapsed in 1989–91.

### The Postcommunist Changes

The ouster of communist oligarchies, which did lead to real regime change even when the outcome was authoritarian rule, was primarily (except to a considerable degree in Russia) about reclaiming national independence, not about the question of the proper regime to rule. Mikhail Gorbachev initiated the changes from above. There were no popular insurrections, except to a limited degree in Romania. In Poland, the widely supported, highly organized, and decade-long campaign of Solidarity against the regime more closely resembled traditional revolutionary models. Yet it was very striking (and articulated in so many words by numerous Eastern European dissidents) that these events did not take place in the name of any ideology or theory of government. This is strange because, as Flaubert highlights in his novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, all of modern life is somehow constituted by ideas: Our very instincts take the form of egalitarianism, or feminism, or professionalism, which are not simply feelings but ideas. Finally, the absence of violence in the collapse of communism was remarkable. There were some minor exceptions, ranging from about a thousand lives lost in Romania in 1989 to one in Chechnya in 1992, but none of these cases was a traditional revolution by violence.

The postcommunist upheavals were “velvet revolutions” or nonviolent regime changes, but with one most important reservation: Ethnic cleansing resulted in nine cases in the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, often with considerable violence. The question is whether to associate the ethnic violence with the regime changes, and therefore to consider them as classical revolutions. This is a profound question about the very nature of contemporary politics. After long reflection, I have concluded that the ousters of communism in these countries should not be considered traditional revolutions. For one thing, the establishment of new political communities, which in many cases had an ethnic definition, often preceded by years the outbreak of ethnic violence. Exceptions were observed in Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, where the violence came first or simultaneously and greatly contributed to defining new non-Soviet communities. But in the other cases, a community

("we the people") did not rise up as such to define its new political forms. Rather, the old forms fell away, and the absence of forms required ethnic separation in order to define a political community. The need for a definition comes from the *absence* of any explicit revolutionary ideology that could legitimate the rule of certain human beings over others—for example, of the people over the king and aristocrats, or of the working class and its vanguard over the other classes.<sup>10</sup>

It is striking that the leaders of the new political communities created through ethnic cleansing differed from traditional revolutionary leaders in that they did not try to strengthen the state that they nominally came to control. Leaders such as Alija Izetbegović in Bosnia, Ibrahim Rugova in Kosovo, Dzhokar Dudayev in Chechnya, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia, Vladislav Ardzinba in Abkhazia, Ludwig Chibirov in South Ossetia, and Abulfaz Elchibey in Azerbaijan all presided over new regimes in which the imperative of state-building was extremely weak. In Kosovo, the new postcommunist government did not even attempt to establish uniform sovereignty over its territory by a monopoly of the means of coercion—that is, through an army. Instead, Ibrahim Rugova's Albanian authorities operated a pacifist administration that organized most aspects of life in Kosovo but coexisted for nine years with the parallel Serb government (which represented only the small Serb minority). The Kyrgyz upheaval of 2005 resembled the overthrow of communism in this respect, with the already weak Kyrgyz state becoming even weaker.

The other two "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine returned to the revolutionary practice of strengthening the state. This was especially true in Georgia, where Saakashvili, in his January 2004 inaugural address, emphasized the strengthening of the state and its necessary instrument, the army. The subsequent restoration of effective Georgian sovereignty over Ajaria and the dramatic increase in revenue collection returned Georgia to a more traditional postrevolutionary pattern.

## Contemporary Thought and Revolution

Even before the collapse of communism, classical revolution had been largely superseded in thought. The theoretical understanding that guided those seeking to promote change in communist countries came primarily from three bodies of thought that began to emerge during the 1970s.

The first of these approaches to develop was the dissident thinking of East Central Europe. The earliest strategy for liberation from communist rule was guided by traditional revolutionary models and produced the long postwar insurgencies in Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania. But the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the failure of the West to support it seem to have marked a turning point. Gradually, dissidents began to disavow revolutionary violence, believing that So-



viet power made it hopeless. They concentrated instead on building a decent, nonideological “civil society” underneath the ruling communist regimes in which men could live more freely. Not all dissidents accepted this approach, and it was never as influential in the Soviet Union itself. The most impressive Soviet dissident, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, defended camp revolts and the murder of informers.

The second powerful body of thought focused on the importance of the market and the realization that socialism was a mistake. This created difficulty for the idea of traditional popular revolution, because everyone expected scant enthusiasm among the people in general for the abolition or fundamental transformation of communist welfare systems.

The third approach came from Western social scientists, who developed new ways to think about changes in the direction of democracy. This was led by Philippe Schmitter and Guillermo O’Donnell, working under the aegis of the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Latin American program at the end of the 1970s. They explicitly rejected violence and a revolutionary path of political change, offering advice to the left: “The only realistic alternative for the left is to accept the above restrictions” (that is, to work within a more gradual and negotiated or “pacted” transition, and to hope).<sup>11</sup> There emerged from this body of thought a widely voiced view that democracies need to be “crafted” from above. Not all of the influential early theorists of transition to democracy intended to exclude revolution as a means of regime change; Juan Linz includes it as one variant of *ruptura*, while Samuel Huntington includes it under the category of “replacement.”<sup>12</sup> Yet Linz’s general emphasis was that “in most authoritarian regimes,” neither transformation by those in power alone nor “successful *ruptura*” “is available to those in power or those in the opposition.”<sup>13</sup> The eventual result was that “transition to democracy” emerged as a new concept that, although it descriptively included revolution as a rare and minor case, in practice discouraged democratic activists from looking to revolution.

The notion of “transition to democracy” as a successor concept to revolution had tremendous appeal for a number of reasons. First, the outcome of Leninist and fascist revolutions had proved disastrous. Second, there was a growing aversion to violence in the world, with the significant exception of many Muslim societies. Third, there was an estrangement from ideology, both because of sad experience with anti-democratic ideology and because the original ideologies of democracy, centered on the concepts of the state of nature and the social contract, had grown very old and did not have the same intellectual power that they had had in the eighteenth century. Since that time, the notion of appealing to man’s natural state as against artificial impositions has been weakened by the rise of historicism and relativism. A fourth factor requires greater self-examination on the part of those of us who are social scientists. We ourselves are members of elites, and the notion of

political processes that are managed from above is a comfortable one for us. By contrast, the notion of the spontaneity of the masses—people rushing into the streets shouting and shooting—provokes in us some of the same uncomfortable feeling that it did in aristocrats in the eighteenth century. Fifth, the notion of transition to democracy has tremendous appeal both to those governments said to be undergoing a democratic transition and to the Western governments that are helping them. Many failures of human rights and democracy can be explained away by saying, “Well, the country is still in transition.”

“Transition to democracy” had the same attraction as the English ideology called “the Whig conception of history”—the notion that English liberty gradually developed from the time of Magna Carta in 1215 through the Glorious Revolution of 1688, to the parliamentary reform bills of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Reverence for a particular past is thus combined with a taste for innovation. Transition to democracy has a similar appeal: It is not harsh and does not make negative judgments on other cultures or on communism, yet it incorporates a clear notion of reform—the idea of other societies becoming better and better. The charms of this concept lie deep in contemporary man’s psyche. Perhaps the notion of transition to democracy partakes of a general love in contemporary times of vagueness or indeterminacy. Consider the European Union: It is not clear if it is a federation, a confederation, or an alliance—somehow, it is drifting between all those things. Humanitarian interventions are neither wars nor aid operations, but something in between. As Allan Bloom points out, love affairs have been superseded by “gray and formless” things called relationships.

Revolution is a notion implying sudden discontinuity and movement to a new regime. If there is no new regime, a revolution has failed. “Transition to democracy,” in contrast, does not necessarily imply how long the process will take; at least this was the idea as it came to be applied in practice to the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. In its application it was in some ways a distortion of the original idea, which spoke of *ruptura* and breakthrough, and whose most salient cases were rapid transitions. In 1992, when almost everyone thought that Russia had essentially made a change to democracy, the Russian “transition” did not seem essentially different from those of Spain or South Africa. But by 2006, it had become clear that the situation in Russia is very different.

### **“Transition to Democracy” in the Former USSR**

“Transition to democracy” as an approach worked adequately in most of Eastern Europe and in noncommunist East Asia. It did not work well at all in the former Soviet Union, in federal Yugoslavia or Albania, in China or Cambodia, in the Middle East, or in sub-Saharan Africa. In the majority of “transitional countries” there was not the expected sequence

of stages (opening, breakthrough, consolidation) but a complicated, confused process with no clear direction. In the former Soviet Union, democratizing reforms ebbed and flowed under leaders like Boris Yeltsin and Shevardnadze, but with a drift toward the ultimate consolidation of authoritarian rule. Those great democratic heroes like Kyrgyzstan's Askar Akayev and Yeltsin turned out to be authoritarian rulers, or gave their power to people whom they expected to be authoritarian rulers, like Vladimir Putin. It is striking that in the ex-Soviet transitions, not a single ruler chose to hand over his power to anyone likely to rule in a more democratic manner.

Formlessness is an intrinsic problem of "transition to democracy." If the transition can be interpreted or misinterpreted as a long process, landmarks of success or failure recede into the flux of political and economic events. It resembles guerrilla warfare: It is hard to know when you are winning because there are no great victories or defeats that serve as milestones. Unfortunately, some aspects of the classical thinking on democratic transitions have lent themselves to this danger. Huntington said that "the genius of the Brazilian transformation is that it is virtually impossible to say at what point Brazil stopped being a dictatorship and became a democracy."<sup>14</sup>

The additional notion of "better" and "worse" elections, itself legitimized by the concept of gradual transition, has played an exceptionally corrupting role. As the original theorists of democratic transition argued, elections can be prominent landmarks in democratic development, but only if they are fair overall or produce unexpected outcomes. Western democracy-assistance programs have introduced a plethora of technical features, such as transparent ballot boxes, that can be heralded as improvements and used to obscure the critical question of whether or not a government is trying to misrepresent the results. Western governments that have sensitive relationships with the "transitional" countries, as well as the election-monitoring groups that too often respond to those governments, can then trumpet the "improvements" that were made, even if the overall election result was determined by government manipulation. Elections in countries with no democratic tradition will always be imperfect, marred by practices such as fathers voting for whole families or village authorities implicitly pressuring voters, but the decisive questions are whether a government is trying to misrepresent the result and whether it succeeds in doing so. The "transition" concept frames many matters of political change in a way that is dangerous to democracy.

The intellectual epitaph of the transition paradigm was chiseled in January 2002 by Thomas Carothers's powerful *Journal of Democracy* article on "The End of the Transition Paradigm." Yet the corpse lingers: Academic articles, conferences, and democratic governments constantly speak of "democratic transition." The simplest and most beneficial change in the way social scientists describe countries that are not now consoli-

dated democracies would be the complete eradication of the concept of “transition to democracy.” The most dangerous single aspect of that concept is to permit the assumption that the arrival of democracy can be very slow. While there may be exceptional cases where this is true—for instance, Brazil or England—there are far more examples in which a long, formless “transition” has served as an excuse for authoritarianism and its foreign friends. And if “transition to democracy” turns out to be so problematic, it should make us ask again: Does classical revolution have advantages?

Dissatisfaction with the ambiguity of “transition to democracy” and some attraction to revolution appeared in the “color revolutions” in the former Soviet Union: Georgia in November 2003, Ukraine a year later, and finally Kyrgyzstan in February and March 2005. There was an unsuccessful imitation of the Kyrgyz Revolution, with violence on both sides, at and around Andijan, Uzbekistan, in May 2005. These upheavals had some common features, best elaborated by Michael McFaul.<sup>15</sup> He points out that the color revolutions all followed fraudulent elections, but does not draw some plausible inferences from this fact. Free elections symbolize freedom, while fraudulent elections symbolize phony freedom. At the deepest level, these “color revolutions” were about freedom itself (as opposed to national independence) in a much clearer way than the upheavals of 1989–91. The “color revolutions” were more radical, more genuinely focused on achieving self-rule, than the changes at the end of communism.

As McFaul notes, the “color revolutions” all took place in soft autocracies or competitive-authoritarian regimes. They were also directed against very unpopular rulers. All postcommunist competitive-authoritarian rulers, including Putin, are fundamentally illegitimate, as they possess neither communist nor democratic legitimacy. (Kleptocracy, which exists throughout the former Soviet space, is the least legitimate regime, because citizens feel that this system violates their personal rights and needs.) Imitation or contagion was very important in the “color revolutions.” The Georgian revolution followed that of the Serbs, another Orthodox Christian people who had seemed to mismanage everything and to lose their ethnic wars. Georgia showed that democratic breakthrough was possible on the soil of the former USSR, which inspired another predominantly Orthodox people, the Ukrainians. Ukraine in turn provoked the ex-Soviet but Muslim Kyrgyz, who were then imitated (though more violently) by Muslim Uzbeks in the adjoining Ferghana Valley. The “color revolutions” were all nonviolent—though they were nonviolent in an ambiguous sense.

A final feature, emphasized by Henry Hale,<sup>16</sup> is that these revolutions all exploded when countries were entering a period of succession, with the leader either too old, too unpopular, or too afraid of legal term limits to continue. In every case the people knew that there would be a new

leader. As Hale argues, the patronage networks of authoritarian presidents are personal, and they begin to be recalculated as soon as it is clear that the specific individual will be gone from power. One could add that such authoritarian leaders keep away the fear of the unknown, which has grown potent as life has become more unpredictable than it was under Soviet rule. Yet once a leadership succession is announced, the fear of the unknown is present anyway, and people begin to imagine alternative outcomes. The announcement that a new leader will be chosen is itself a milestone that impels people to reassess their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as they must make decisions with the future as well as the present in mind.

### **Are “Color Revolutions” Revolutionary?**

Are the “color revolutions” real revolutions? Do they constitute a case for revolution? The “color revolutions” do have many features of classical revolutions. The public acceptance of the term “revolution” is very striking. Post-Soviet publics have not been romantic about “revolution,” for they associate it (as they do the word “party”) with an old and oppressive regime. In neither Georgia nor Ukraine was the term first used by the insurgent forces themselves; in Georgia, the label was first applied by a friendly television interviewer, and in Ukraine, by the Yanukovich forces who used it as a bogeyman to frighten voters. Yet the people in both countries accepted the term, suggesting that it has the right connotations for them.

All three “color revolutions” involved the public discrediting of the old order; in no case would it be possible to reverse course except by the gradual degeneration of the present government. The “color revolutions” were also clear mass movements that mobilized huge parts of the populations, though it is impossible to measure proponents and opponents of the revolution with accuracy. In Ukraine, the results of the repeat election (following the Supreme Court’s annulment of the presidential runoff held in November 2004) showed that there remained massive opposition to Yushchenko’s cause in southern and eastern Ukraine. But even in Ukraine, the disruption of ordinary routine by massive demonstrations leading to unexpected and sweeping political changes provided a milestone separating the political future from the past.

The color revolutionaries were conflicted about ideology, as shown by some of the names of youth groups (in Georgia there was “Kmara,” or “it’s enough,” and in Ukraine there was “Pora,” or “it’s time”). The revolutionary sense of urgency is clearly reflected in those names. They reflect the sense, common in ideological revolutions, that the systems before and after ought to be fundamentally different. At the same time, however, they are evasive about where the crux of the old regime’s unacceptability lies and about the precise objective of change.

If we compare these recent upheavals with our original definition of revolution, the most obvious difference is that they were nonviolent, with the exception of the unsuccessful Andijan uprising. Nonviolent regime changes can generate violent imitation. Some writers on the Kyrgyz events consider them to have been violent, because President Akayev's hired toughs fought with demonstrators, not using firearms, before the president fled. In both Georgia and Ukraine, the question of the *availability* of violence played an enormous role, because the fates of the old regimes were sealed by the eventual unwillingness of their security forces and armies to defend them by dispersing the demonstrators.<sup>17</sup> In Ukraine, one government building was seized; Yuliya Tymoshenko wanted to seize more but was restrained by Yushchenko, a Christian with a greater dedication to nonviolence. In Georgia, the protesters led by Saakashvili forced their way into the parliament chamber, where the fraudulent election results were about to be formalized, and dispersed the legislators. In each of the three cases, the prolonged use of firearms would have dissolved the widespread popular support behind the revolution, because post-Soviet populations are allergic to violence and even to armies and police. If the "color revolutions" are genuinely revolutionary, they represent a new and largely nonviolent subspecies of revolution; in this important respect, they differ from classical revolutions.

Violence is the feature of classical revolutions most pregnant with dangerous effects. On the whole, the abandonment of violence as a means to democratic breakthroughs must be seen as a gain. At the same time, those trying to encourage democracy need to understand that breakthroughs are difficult to "craft" (or even to anticipate long in advance); they are likely to be sudden and chaotic, and to have some chance of escalating into violence. In few concrete cases will the dividing line between violence and nonviolence be precise. Illegal demonstrations may easily lead to building seizures and scuffles with police, which in turn may lead to the employment of firearms and then the organization of armed groups. In this inherently messy situation, the easy tendency of democratic activists and democratic governments abroad to welcome the overthrow of authoritarian governments—even if they did not seek the way it came about—is probably a healthy instinct. What is questionable is our allied tendency to exempt the ensuing governments from scrutiny.

The democratic promise of nonviolent revolutions varies in different regions of the world, depending on their traditions and political experiences. Revolution can have only catastrophic effects in Muslim countries, because violence and extremism are even more attractive there now than they were in the disastrous heyday of left-nationalist revolution. (A country whose population is disillusioned with Islamist rule, such as Iran, could be an exception.) Africa might be a region in which revolutionary events could empower passive publics and transform the dreary alternation between defective democracy and defective military

rule, but major violence may be more attractive and thus a more likely outcome there than in other regions, and military rule is much more likely to result. In Latin America, Hugo Chávez illustrates the continuing dangers of the revolutionary tradition, but there is also danger in allowing populist protest to be confiscated by antidemocratic forces. Some of the pacted transitions, such as that in Ecuador, were not, in the long run, satisfying to their publics, possibly leaving some opening for democratic revolution.

Where revolution has the greatest democratic potential is in former communist areas, perhaps including Russia (and one day Cuba and China). In such places, the greatest barrier to democracy is the people's sense of helplessness and estrangement from everything public. The empowerment that comes from vast demonstrations and other revolutionary events can be tremendously salutary. The examples of Georgia and Ukraine show that the inevitable postrevolutionary disillusionment is not as crippling as we might have supposed. In these countries, the post-totalitarian allergy against violence dampens the potential of minor clashes to escalate and keeps the armed forces out of politics, at least for now, but it also heightens the risk that any higher level of violence will discredit popular mobilization. Kyrgyzstan vividly illustrates the danger that revolutionary dynamics may be captured for selfish coups d'état, a danger endemic in places where the communist discrediting of the public world has turned politics into an opportunity for personal gain. In postcommunist authoritarian countries successful mass organization appears to be a prerequisite for democratic breakthroughs.

### Effective Regime Change?

The question remains as to whether the "color revolutions" produced *enduring* regime changes. In all three countries, the new leaders are officials who split from the former governments; in Georgia, however, many figures from nongovernmental organizations were brought into government, a partial change of the ruling type of people. An even graver question is raised by the history of earlier presidents in all three countries. Kuchma in Ukraine, Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze in Georgia, and Akayev in Kyrgyzstan all appeared at one time to have accomplished a shift to democratic rule, only to yield to authoritarian temptations. The chance of consolidated democracy in Kyrgyzstan is very low, because the "Tulip Revolution" only replaced one former communist apparatchik with a less sophisticated one, and the northern elite with a more parochial southern elite. In all three states, some important features of democracy, such as genuine rule of law, have been almost wholly disregarded.

Democratic consolidation confronts many problems both in Georgia and in Ukraine. To simplify vastly, the problem in Georgia is the au-

thoritarian temptation, while in Ukraine it is the lack of effective reforms and the return of old forces. Yanukovich, the authoritarian candidate for the Ukrainian presidency in 2004, became prime minister under Yushchenko in 2006. In Georgia, Saakashvili's government was more successful than anyone anticipated in eliminating low-level corruption and collecting more revenue; this helped to strengthen considerably a very weak state. But Saakashvili's reformers have not fully accepted the need for an opposition, and officials from the nongovernmental sector who know social science have happily labeled the new regime a "dominant-party system." In Ukraine, where the state was stronger to begin with and opposition was almost inevitable given the size of the country, its ethnohistorical diversity, and the existence of many power centers during Soviet times, Yushchenko saw himself as an inspirational leader, not an administrator. In the first session of parliament after the revolution, Yushchenko submitted fewer draft laws than at any time since Ukraine became independent. Whether the "color revolutions" should be considered actual revolutions can be debated, but they clearly mark an unexpected return of revolutionary impulses that not long ago seemed to be dying out.

There is, on the basis of the "color revolutions," a case for revolution. These "color revolutions" can be understood in terms of what anthropologists call "rites of passage," which include weddings, puberty ceremonies, and funerals. These rites separate and symbolize two distinct periods, whereas the concept of "transition to democracy" has come to have a foggy indeterminacy. Particularly for postcolonial populations, like many in the former Soviet Union, such rites can give people a sense of efficacy and the energy to solve problems. As the Azerbaijani democrat Leila Alieva says, social scientists somehow do not understand the need for celebration.

Revolutions define new national heroes and villains and re-create national traditions. I was particularly struck, when doing interviews in Kyiv in November 2005, with the way in which democratic activists, even as they talked about all the problems (Yushchenko was not reforming, Tymoshenko was a demagogue, and so forth), nonetheless agreed that a return to the authoritarianism of the Kuchma years was impossible. Even with the disappointments that have followed it, the Orange Revolution remains a milestone. There is more diversity of opinion in other Ukrainian cities and among Georgian democrats, but middle-class Georgians, even while scolding the Saakashvili government, still trace to the revolution a new feeling that people can change things. Most of the objective problems that discourage democracy advocates looking at Armenia, Cambodia, Guinea, or even China today also existed in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Yet there is a sense in Georgia and Ukraine that they can never go back. Perhaps the modern kind of non-violent revolution can function as a gate that opens only in one direc-



tion, giving people energy to open up a new stage of their national history while closing to them their undemocratic past.

## NOTES

1. Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 447.

2. Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The Works of Lord Macaulay: History of England*, vol. 3 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1898), 115.

3. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Dumont's Life of Mirabeau," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. 2, new and revised ed., (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1857), 140.

4. David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James II, 1688*, vol. 5 (Boston: Aldine, n.d.), ch. 59, 330.

5. Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 166.

6. Macaulay, *Essays*, 140.

7. Hume, *The History of England*, vol. 2, 402.

8. Quoted in Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, *The Origins of Contemporary France: The French Revolution*, trans. John Durand (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962), 3: 473; compare 14, 22–29, 44, 113, 472–75.

9. Taine, *The Origins of Contemporary France*, 440–50.

10. For this interpretation of ethnic cleansing, see G.M. Tamás, "Ethnarchy and Ethnoanarchism," in *Social Research* (No. 1, 1996): 147–90; and Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Wars of Hatred and the Hatred of War," *Weekly Standard*, 19 April 1999, 22–27.

11. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

12. See Juan J. Linz, "Transitions to Democracy," *Washington Quarterly* 2 (Summer 1990): 145–59 *passim*.; and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 121, 142, 148.

13. Linz, "Transitions to Democracy," 151.

14. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 126. Brazil is by far the slowest of the "transformations" he lists, his only precedent for the post-Soviet "transitions."

15. Michael McFaul, "Transitions from Postcommunism," *Journal of Democracy* 16 (July 2005): 5–19.

16. Henry Hale, "Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Politics* 58 (October 2005): 133–65; and Fairbanks, "Wars of Hatred and the Hatred of War," 112.

17. See C.J. Chivers, "How Top Spies in Ukraine Changed the Nation's Path," *New York Times*, 17 January 2005; and Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (April 2004): 116–17.