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The Kremlin's Second Preventive Counter-Revolution: A Case of Authoritarian Learning from Success

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ABSTRACT

In 2004, the Kremlin began what was termed its first preventive counter-revolution to counter a potential Colour Revolution reaching Russia and leading to the collapse of the Russian regime, like in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004. The first preventive counter-revolution involved restrictions on the media, the opposition, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the repression of other independent areas of society to alleviate a Colour Revolution occurring on the streets of Moscow.

The contention made here is that the second preventive counter-revolution, which lasted from 2012 to 2018, incorporated many of the practices of the first preventive counter-revolution and is an example of authoritarian learning from success. Nevertheless, there is also a case to be made that the second preventive counter-revolution took learnt from the success, or rather perceived success, of another source. Believing that the West, especially America, had supported protesters and democratic opposition groups in the Colour Revolutions, as well as helped instigate the revolutions of the Arab Spring and Euromaidan and attempts at revolution in Russia between 2011 and 2012, the Kremlin adapted these successful strategies for its own purposes. It devised methods to take the second preventive counter-revolution abroad in an attempt to counter Western actions and alleviate the possibility that a revolution could occur in Russia.

The second preventive counter-revolution of the Kremlin provides further the literature on authoritarian learning. As will be shown the existing literature has largely concentrated on learning from failure. However, the Kremlin's second preventive counter-revolution provides an example of learning from internal and external success.

Keywords: Russia; Kremlin; preventive counter-revolution; Putin; Euromaidan.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, the Kremlin has instigated what I term as the second preventive counter-revolution, which is arguably ongoing. Taking best practices from a previous preventive counter-revolution, which had been tasked with alleviating a potential Colour Revolution occurring in Moscow, as well as learning from the Arab Spring, 2011-2012 protests in Moscow and the Euromaidan, and perceived Western methods of regime change particularly in the post-Soviet space, the Kremlin instigated a second preventive counter-revolution in response. The paper contends that the second preventive counter-revolution is a case of learning from success from both internal experience – the first preventive counter-revolution of 2004 to 2008 – and external practices in learning from the three revolutions between 2010 and 2014 and perceptions of the tactics used by Western governments, principally the United States. Learning from success has included several different elements from the adoption of tougher NGO legislation to the messages aimed at external audiences.

In order to understand how the second preventive counter-revolution is a case of learning from success, I will define learning and success before analysing existing literature on authoritarian learning. From there, I shall investigate the Colour Revolutions in the post-Soviet region from 2003 to 2005 and ascertain the Kremlin's reaction to these events. Afterwards I shall look at the learning that came with the second preventive counter-revolution and argue that this phenomenon is a case of learning from internal and external success.

Using Levy's (1994: 206) definition, learning is a "change of beliefs, skills, or procedures based on the observation and interpretation of experience." However, there is a missing word at the beginning of this definition: *process*. Learning can be traced by detailing policy and legislative changes and through the analysis of regime discourse. Using process tracing learning can be analysed, as process tracing shows why certain choices were made (George and McKeown, 1985: 35). Having defined learning and introduced a theoretical framework to be used, I turn to defining success. Success is different to being successful. The Kremlin may learn from the success of previous domestic examples or external elements but fail to implement these successfully. Success is the accomplishment of an aim that may have both good and bad outcomes, allowing for the implementation of learning from success

by the Kremlin but the possibility of failure in implementing these outcomes successfully.

I shall assess the literature on authoritarian learning before engaging with the first preventive counter-revolution. This will allow me to highlight that the internal aspects of the second preventive counter-revolution take many lessons from this event, although they are re-defined by the Arab Spring, 2011-2012 Russian protests and the Euromaidan. These are investigated to emphasise that this is the case. An argument here is that the second preventive counter-revolution has two elements: internal and external elements, where both of which are analysed. The main contention here is that both elements help provide an understanding of authoritarian learning from success with lessons derived from internal (the first preventive counter-revolution) and external (Arab Spring, 2011-2012 protests, Euromaidan and perceived Western machinations).

THE EMERGING FIELD OF AUTHORITARIAN LEARNING LITERATURE

The conceptualisation of authoritarian learning remains limited, although there have been imperfect attempts to explain authoritarian learning using existing wider learning literature (Bank and Edel, 2015; Hall and Ambrosio, 2017). The literature on authoritarian learning really began with the Arab Spring with a focus on how some authoritarian regimes appeared to learn from the collapse of other authoritarian regimes, as in Egypt and Tunisia (Heydemann and Leenders, 2011; Heydemann, 2013; Heydemann and Ketcham, 2016; Volpi, 2013a; 2013b; Josua, 2016; Josua and Edel, 2015). Current literature largely focuses on learning from the failure of other authoritarian regimes, both in the Middle East and North Africa during the Arab Spring as well as in the post-Soviet space. Ambrosio (2017) investigates the failure of Yanukovych during the Euromaidan and the lessons of this failure for other authoritarian regimes. At the same time, Hall (2017a) focused on the investigation of learning from domestic failure, analysing lessons that Yanukovych took from the 2004 Orange Revolution, and implemented upon becoming president in 2010 to counter a future Orange Revolution. Nevertheless, he was too busy fighting a possible Colour Revolution and the regime was unprepared for the Euromaidan, culminating in a failure to adapt in time.

While most analyses of authoritarian learning have investigated failure, there has been limited focus on learning from authoritarian success. Hall (2017b) analysed Kremlin learning from the Belarusian regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, after it quickly reacted to the Serbian Bulldozer Revolution in 2001 and was, therefore, a testing-ground from which the Kremlin[1] could draw its own lessons. Bank and Edel (2017) have detailed how some Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes learnt from the success of others. However, so far, there has been no investigation of learning from domestic success. The contention made here is that the second preventive counter-revolution has a component of internal learning from success, taken from lessons drawn from the first preventive counter-revolution during the Colour Revolutions. It is a pertinent example of learning from internal success.

A second contention is that authoritarian learning does not just happen between authoritarian regimes, they also learn from democracies. Golosov (2017: 190) showed how the Kremlin copied the German electoral system, but re-interpreted it to protect the Kremlin from losing power. Democratic electoral systems were adapted to secure the regime against losing power through elections[2]. While Kremlin drew lessons from democratic regimes I contend that the second preventive counter-revolution is a case of lesson-drawing from hegemonic states and international authorities, such as the United States and the European Union (EU). The United States especially can enforce its values and, with its belief in its own exceptionalism, successive U.S. governments have attempted to impose on states. At the same time, the EU has been less hegemonic in its attempts to enforce its values. Therefore, rather than learning from democracies, the Kremlin perceived that hegemonic actors were involved in the revolutions from 2001 to 2014, and as such it is learning from these entities and the tactics they supposedly used.

Since 2000, Putin relies on a close-knit circle of former security service officers and fellow Petersburgers (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 2003: 292). Therefore, regime elites trained in the playbook of the Soviet KGB, see Western, primarily U.S., control behind every action. With this view resonating in the top echelons of the Kremlin, it

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[1] When referring to the Russian regime, I use the term the Kremlin.
[2] Interview with Yury Kabanov – Lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), St. Petersburg, 24/10/2016, St. Petersburg.

is little wonder that U.S. and EU actions were seen behind the Colour Revolutions. These covert practices were perceived to continue with the Arab Spring. The Euromaidan and ensuing Revolution of Dignity brought the United States and the EU up to Russia's borders (Ambrosio, 2017: 480). During the 2011-2012 Russian protests, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appeared on Russian state media as the master puppeteer controlling the protesters (Crowley and Ioffe, 2016). After the Euromaidan, Putin (2014) claimed that America was involved from the start and had funded the alleged *coup* against Yanukovych. These allegations had some weight due to Victoria Nuland's[3] presence and alleged actions in forming a new government before Yanukovych fled (Hudson, 2015; Chernysheva, 2015: 5). In addition to Nuland, Catherine Ashton[4] broke diplomatic protocol by visiting the Euromaidan (Radio Svoboda, 2013). Each action gave the Kremlin ammunition to portray Western malevolence and it is possible that at least some in the Kremlin believed this line of events.

Perceiving that the United States and the EU were involved in the 2011-2012 Russian protests with Hillary Clinton personally directing the protesters and Victoria Nuland and Catherine Ashton visiting the Euromaidan, the Kremlin felt that like the Colour Revolutions these later events were about regime change. The same is true of the Arab Spring with Medvedev (2011) in a speech to the National Anti-Terrorism Committee stating that it was a "scenario harboured for us, and now attempts to implement it are even more likely." Believing that the West was destabilising authoritarian regimes, like Russia, the Kremlin felt it could do the same in the West (Krastev, 2015).

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE KREMLIN'S FIRST PREVENTIVE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

The Colour Revolutions all involved a prominent role for NGOs, youth and the Internet. Activists from earlier revolutions visited prospective revolutionaries to train them and pass on successful ideas (Colin, 2007). After the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine – a part of the wider Colour Revolution phenomenon – the Kremlin

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[3] Then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.
[4] Then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

instigated what Horvath (2011; 2013) termed a preventive counter-revolution to stop a Colour Revolution in Moscow. Duncan (2013) argues that the Kremlin truly feared such an eventuality. The Russian authorities wanted to avert a trend spreading from Belgrade to Tbilisi and Kyiv reaching Moscow (Ambrosio, 2007: 237). The preventive counter-revolution attempted to "appropriate the revolutionary methods" (Horvath, 2013: 6) of the Colour Revolutions with an ideology "structured around the idea that Russia's sovereignty was menaced by Western efforts to foment a revolution and impose 'external rule,'" (Horvath, 2013: 6), combined with draconian measures on entities like NGOs that might try to instigate a Colour Revolution and the creation of pro-regime groups to increase public support for the regime (Horvath, 2013: 7). As will be demonstrated, the first preventive counter-revolution was part of the lessons for the second incarnation between 2012 and the present.

The Kremlin restricted the activities of youth groups, sowed disunity in the opposition, and limited NGO operations. Electoral changes constrained non-regime opposition parties from accessing parliament and a new pro-Kremlin youth group, *Nashi*, counteracted non-regime youth groups and democratic activists. A new ideology of sovereign democracy placed greater emphasis on sovereignty, which ensured Kremlin power (Horvath, 2011; 2013; Finkel and Brudny, 2012; Petrov, 2010). The Kremlin constrained the movements of Mikhail Kas'yanov, a former prime minister who was close to Western governments and whom the Kremlin assumed would likely be a Russian Saakashvili[5] or Yushchenko[6] (Duncan, 2013).

TWO REVOLUTIONS AND A PROTEST: THE ARAB SPRING, EUROMAIDAN AND THE 2011-2012 RUSSIAN PROTESTS

While the Colour Revolutions and the first preventive counter-revolution involved similar practices to some tactics used in the second preventive counter-revolution there were differences due to the changes that occurred in tactics by protesters in the Arab Spring, 2011-2012 Russian protests and Euromaidan. The main change was the use of social media. While the Internet played a role in the Colour Revolutions, the growth of social media took-off after the Colour Revolutions as Facebook and

[5] Mikhail Saakashvili led the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia.
[6] Viktor Yushchenko led the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

Twitter were founded only in 2004 and 2006. The Arab Spring, 2011-2012 Russian protests and the Euromaidan emphasised the importance of social media.

The Kremlin adapted to the changed environment with practices used after the Colour Revolutions, which remained a useful reference point, but ineffective in dealing with the three new revolutions. The Kremlin drew lessons from each episode. For instance, the Arab Spring resulted in the collapse of long-lived authoritarian regimes that likely alarmed other authoritarian regimes. The Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, met Algerian and Moroccan counterparts to discuss their successful counter strategies (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2012b; Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2016). He also met Egyptian representatives to learn from their failure (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2015). Another meeting saw Patrushev and his Chinese equivalent, Dai Bingguo, discuss Russian-Chinese responses to the Arab Spring (Security Council of the Russian Federation, 2012a). The deposing of Gaddafi by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was seen as the precursor to regime change in Moscow (Dzhemal, 2011).

The Russian 2011-2012 protests occurred all but two kilometres from the Kremlin. It is highly likely this worried the regime and served as the primary reason for needing a new preventive counter-revolution. The Kremlin was fortunate to have time to recalibrate allowing it to limit elite defections (Odynova, 2011: 1). Putin's electoral victory in 2012 led to a reduction in the number of protesters and a show of force, highlighting that the Kremlin retained high coercive capabilities. The march of two pro-Kremlin youth groups, *Nashi* and *Molodaya Gvardiya*, through central Moscow helped reduce protester numbers as well (Lindele, 2011; Novaya Gazeta, 2011, p. 6; Sulimina, 2011).

The Euromaidan resulted in the demise of a pro-Russian authoritarian leader[7]. There was one key lesson for the Kremlin from the Euromaidan. Yanukovych did not use enough force because Bankova[8] did not have the coercive capacity and repression

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[7] Interview with Professor Olexiy Haran – Professor at the National University of Kyiv-Myhola Academy, 17/11/2016, Kyiv.
[8] This refers to the Presidential Administration on Bankova Street in central Kyiv. Like the Kremlin in Moscow it dominates central Kyiv and is a euphemism for the Ukrainian regime.

angered protesters (Way, 2014). Off-screen repression involving attacks on protesters away from media coverage created more exasperation (Wilson, 2014: 81; Rojansky and Ruble, 2013). If Yanukovych had waited out the protests and had the coercive capacity, it is likely the Euromaidan would have failed. Nevertheless, he was impatient and used repression without the capabilities to follow through. By angering protesters, Yanukovych precipitated a zero-sum game.

THE DOMESTIC FEATURES OF THE SECOND PREVENTIVE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Like the first preventive counter-revolution, the second version had an internal element; however, while instances were drawn from the first preventive counter-revolution there are qualitative differences in the new preventive counter-revolution as the Kremlin adapted to the Arab Spring, 2011-2012 Russian protests and Euromaidan. It is likely this protest affected the Kremlin more than the Arab Spring and the Euromaidan, as it occurred in central Moscow. During the 2011-2012 protests, a number of NGOs had monitored the 2011 parliamentary and 2012 presidential elections. Their observation activities highlighted electoral fraud during the 2011 parliamentary elections. The extent of the cheating was the catalyst that brought protesters onto the streets (Zatuliveter, 2011). The reports of electoral fraud showed the Kremlin that the 2006 NGO law that had placed financial restrictions on NGOs and increased their day-to-day bureaucracy (Schmidt, 2006: 3) had not been coercive enough. Therefore, the Kremlin instigated further restrictions for their reporting of electoral fraud[9]. Belarusian legislation was copied by the Kremlin and in 2012, the Kremlin passed the foreign agents' law[10].

The law stipulated that NGOs engaged in political activity – as defined by the regime – must publish biannual activity reports, have an annual tax inspection and register as foreign agents. The broad definition of political activity allowed the authorities to target any NGO[11]. A 2014 legislative change, allowed the Kremlin to register the NGOs as foreign agents (Prosvirova, 2014: 6). With no Western funding, NGOs had to

[9] Interview with Dr. Nikolay Petrov – Professor at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, 01/10/2016, Moscow.
[10] Interview with an expert who requested anonymity, 21/11/2016.
[11] Interview with Maria Lipman – editor of the Counterpoint Journal, 01/11/2016, Moscow.

accept regime money and become subservient or close (Trifonova, 2014: 3). The foreign agents' law was a direct lesson from the 2011-2012 protests allowing the Kremlin to restrict a sector that had drawn attention to the electoral fraud.

New protest legislation was a dual lesson from the Arab Spring and specifically the 2011-2012 protests, to better protect the regime from potential protests as the legislation raised the fines for people to protest (The Moscow Times, 2012: 1). Similarly, extremism legislation was redefined to give a wide meaning to what constituted radicalism. Although signed in 2011 and a lesson from the Arab Spring giving the regime the powers to crack down if necessary the authorities interpreted this legislation with greater harshness after the Russian protests[12].

While the Arab Spring and the Euromaidan were largely leaderless, the 2011-2012 Russian protests brought a new opposition leader to the fore. Aleksei Naval'ny having labelled United Russia as the "party of crooks and thieves," faced Kremlin coercion. Like Mikhail Kas'yanov during the first preventive counter-revolution, the Kremlin perceived Naval'ny as a potential opposition figurehead and so has tried to keep him under control. This resulted in numerous court cases that could be opened at any time (Gal'perovich, 2017). On top of this the arrest and imprisonment of Naval'ny's brother, Oleg, has been another way for the Kremlin to keep control over Naval'ny (Kolesnikov, 2017). Trials, arrests and criminal cases against Naval'ny, allow the Kremlin to send a message to others not to destabilise the regime (Kolesnikov, 2013a: 2)

As with sovereign democracy after the Colour Revolutions, the Kremlin developed a new ideology after 2012. The 2011-2012 protests were largely a middle-class affair. Having lost the intelligentsia and those who wanted Russia to remain close to the West, the Kremlin looked to gain support of more conservative Russians who wanted Russia to remain independent and who possessed a pathological fear of the West[13]. This conservative tilt has seen patriotism taught at schools, and a harkening back to "a virtual past" on Russian television (Levinson, 2016: 2). The promotion of moral

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[12] Interview with Marc Bennetts – former journalist at RIA Novosti and current Moscow Correspondent for the Times, 03/11/2016, Moscow.
[13] Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, 04/11/2016, Moscow.

values increases support with conservative sectors of society (Mironov, 2014: 3). The promotion of traditional values and in particular an anti-homosexual agenda has re-established a coalition between the Kremlin and most of society (Gessen, 2017: 468). The Kremlin has skilfully portrayed Putin as protecting national values, with Putin (2013d; 2013c) claiming to be protecting traditional values against a decadent West, allowing him to portray himself as a true democrat by accommodating the views of most Russians (Robinson, 2017: 361). This alliance between the regime and the populace grew rapidly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Kolesnikov, 2015). Through the creation of a conservative ideology, the Kremlin limited external influences, which Putin (2013a) saw as helping undermine Russia. By protecting Russia from alternate values, Putin (2013d) intimated that the promotion of the state would alleviate a possible Arab Spring or Euromaidan in Russia. As will be argued, the rhetoric of traditional values is also important to the external element of the second preventive counter-revolution.

During the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution text messaging and emails, if not precipitating the revolution, brought more people onto the streets and spread news of the protest. Nevertheless, with the rapid growth of social media in the mid-2000s, protests have become even more effective tools for demonstrations. This was highlighted by the role of social media in the Arab Spring, 2011-2012 Russian protests and the Euromaidan.

The Kremlin uses restrictive legislation to limit the capabilities of non-regime entities. Like NGO and protest legislation, a number of laws were passed to counter the role of social media and existing non-regime media. An extremism law had existed since 2002, highlighting learning from the 2001 Serbian Bulldozer Revolution. Nevertheless, with the return of Putin as president for a third term in 2012, the law was re-evaluated to enhance the arsenal of Kremlin capabilities in countering posts on social media. Official Moscow used this law to deem any potential social media post the regime did not appreciate as extremist material. It forced social media platforms, such as VKontakte – the Russian version of Facebook – to self-censor, as the law made these bodies responsible for comments on their websites. Not only can comments be deemed extremist but also under the law, they are interpreted as

public statements bringing them under re-defined slander legislation (von Twickel, 2011: 3).

In the lead up to the 2011-2012 protests, there were a number of prominent, and popular, anti-Kremlin bloggers. Their blogs had covered the electoral fraud of 2011, which raised awareness and increased protester numbers[14]. To limit the power of bloggers the Kremlin created the so-called "bloggers law," in 2014, which amended the law "On Information". According to the new law, any blogger with a readership of more than 3,000 must register with Roskomnadzor[15] as a media outlet (Luganskaya, 2014: 1). Existing media legislation fits with the 2002 extremism legislation as well as encompassing a range of repressive methods designed to curtail media independence (The Moscow Times, 2014b: 4). Consequently, the 2014 law brought non-regime bloggers under greater control and was a direct lesson from the 2011-2012 protests.

In 2013, new legislation required Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to keep records on the data of users and their search histories (Revich, 2013: 2-3). In 2016, an amendment required that ISPs hold data for six months and the security services could now view records without a warrant (Republic (Slon), 2016). Data gathering on a large scale was but one of the methods used with the number of wiretappings on opposition leaders also increasing (Soldatov, 2013: 65). The security services had of course always possessed the capabilities to listen in on conversations but after the Arab Spring and especially the 2011-2012 protests, the number of wiretappings increased (Soldatov and Borogan, 2013). In November 2012, a nation-wide system of Internet filtering appeared, which with its timing – six months after the end of the 2011-2012 protests (Soldatov and Borogan, 2013) – clearly shows the Kremlin is learning. The System of Operative-Investigative Measures (SORM) allows the security services to listen to any device and read messages. Its third-generation capabilities appeared six months after the 2011-2012 protests (Soldatov and Borogan, 2013), again indicating learning. Roskomnadzor created a number of blacklists for errant websites (Soldatov and Borogan, 2015: 166). The fourth blacklist does not require a court order to blacklist a

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[14] Interview with Anna Arutunyan – Author of *The Russian Media* and the *Putin Mystique* and former journalist at RIA Novosti, Prague, 11/09/2016.
[15] Federal service in the sphere of telecom, information technologies and mass media.

website and is reserved for non-regime websites perceived to advocate protests (Soldatov and Borogan, 2015: 263). Blacklisting and filtration systems are organised by the Kremlin youth group *MolodayaGvardiya* (Young Guards) (Soldatov and Borogan, 2015: 172-173; Sivkova, 2014: 2).

Although groups of pro-regime trolls existed before the demonstrations, their role up until 2011 was limited. By September 2013, the Kremlin had two troll factories in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The rise of the trolls is a direct lesson from the 2011-2012 protests to counter alternative domestic messages (Garmazhapova, 2013: 4-5; Berseneva, 2016: 3; Kovalev, 2017: 8). Trolls are also relevant to the external elements of the second preventive counter-revolution.

The most popular social media platform in Russia is VKontakte and during the 2011-2012 protests, its founder, Pavel Durov, allowed the security services to access to the network giving them access to millions of names and a means to monitor protest activity. VKontakte was employed in the second preventive counter-revolution to create fake groups with similar names and symbols to existing protest groups to confuse potential demonstrators (Kolesnikov, 2013b: 2-3). Faced with the use of social media to organise protests, share information and galvanise demonstrators in the 2011-2012 protests, the Euromaidan and indirectly in the Arab Spring, the Kremlin took control of the most likely source where people would congregate online. The Euromaidan provided a number of lessons for the Kremlin. Durov refused to help the Kremlin use the same tactics on VKontakte after the Euromaidan, unlike how he operated during the 2011-2012 Russian protests, and as a result he was pressured into selling the network to pro-Kremlin businessman Alisher Usmanov (The Moscow Times, 2014a: 7; Kravtsova, 2014: 1). This gave the security forces direct access to VKontakte and activists using the network.

In 2014, the Yarovaya package of laws – named after State Duma Deputy Irina Yarovaya – was read in parliament. Nevertheless, the legislative changes went far beyond countering terrorism and the restrictions placed on civil society are a direct lesson from the Euromaidan (Dergachev, 2014). Although the package of laws had Yarovaya's name on it, the presidential administration, security services and Security Council had written the legislation using Yarovaya to announce the law to parliament (Shul'man, 2016b; 2016a). The package of laws increased the number of

data points ISPs had to store, including text messages, telephone calls and audio files (Vinokurov et al. 2016). These laws placed the emphasis on allowing the security services to monitor social media networks, like VKontakte. All data on Russians must be stored in Russia. While Facebook is unlikely to comply, VKontakte, as the most popular network, gives the security services all the information that they need (Evtushenko and Latsinskaya, 2016; Rozhkov and Tishina, 2017: 2). Although the Kremlin already had control over VKontakte, the Yarovaya package of laws gave the security services increased data access. The intrusiveness of the legislation can be attributed to official Moscow learning from the Euromaidan.

Although the Kremlin exerted effort to bring the Internet under greater control – particularly after the Euromaidan – official Moscow passed legislation in 2015 restricting foreign ownership of Russian media outlets. Many media outlets had received foreign funding or were owned outright by foreign companies. However, the Kremlin perceived them to be fronts for Western influence (Bazenkova, 2015: 1), so it took action. By reducing access to foreign money, media outlets were forced to close, face financial uncertainty, or find funding from pro-Kremlin businesses or from the regime itself, which increased restrictions on media outlets[16].

The Russian authorities took another lesson from the Euromaidan and Yanukovych's failure to retain power. During the Euromaidan, Bankova relied on two pro-regime forces. The first of which was the Titushki, who were an undisciplined swarm capable of great violence. Nevertheless, they also fled when faced by demonstrators who reciprocated violence (Wilson, 2014: 78-79). Bankova had another group in its arsenal: the Berkut. They were well-equipped and well-disciplined riot police. While they were an effective force, Bankova did not have the financial resources to build a large force and the Berkut consisted of only 1,241 personnel (Wilson, 2014: 75).

The repressive failure of Bankova alarmed the Kremlin as the demise of a neighbouring authoritarian regime would likely alarm any other authoritarian regime. Having followed events via the news and through Russian *Kurators*[17] in

[16] Interview with Mikhail Fishman – Editor of The Moscow Times, 04/11/2016. Moscow.
[17] *Kurators* are representatives of the Kremlin tasked with working with the governments – and in some cases entities – across the post-Soviet region to preserve Russian interests. *Kurators* can also be tasked with domestic issues like monitoring the political system.

Ukraine, the Kremlin would have learnt from the failure of Bankova's coercive capacity. With the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin gained access to direct information from Berkut personnel, who joined the Russian interior ministry, providing the Kremlin with direct information on how best to counter potential protesters in Moscow and lessons about Yanukovych's failure to retain power (Gazeta.ru, 2014). This direct interaction with the failed lessons of the Euromaidan from Bankova and the necessity of using full coercive practices were valuable lessons.

With the 2011-2012 protests, Euromaidan and Arab Spring in quick succession it is likely the Kremlin was wary of protests reaching Moscow. Certainly, the demonstrations in central Moscow in 2011 and 2012 and the Euromaidan in a neighbouring country would have alarmed the regime. This anxiety can be seen in the lessons that the Kremlin drew on enhancing its repressive capabilities. Cossack units were used by the authorities during the 2011-2012 protests (Golts, 2012: 51), and their presence as a proto-riot police has increased since the Euromaidan, as seen during the 2018 anti-corruption protests, where Cossack units violently dispersed protesters (Artemyev, 2018; Republic (Slon), 2018). Another group, Anti Maidan which consists of groups staging protests in support of the Kremlin to counter the possibility of a Maidan in Moscow, has equally repressive capabilities (Dol'nikov, 2015: 8; Gorbachev, 2018: 1; Borovkov, 2015: 2). By its very name it is a direct lesson from the Euromaidan, even though, like Nashi during the first preventive counter-revolution, it is tasked not just with repression but also increasing the Kremlin's popular support (Gorbachev, 2016: 1).

However, the main tool in the Kremlin's new coercive apparatus is the National Guard (RosGvaridya). Its construction began after the failure of the OMON against protesters in 2011 and 2012, and it was fast-tracked due to events in Kyiv (Baidakova, 2016: 7). Its purpose is to clear protests (E'kspert, 2016: 7). Unlike other interior ministry forces, it is well-equipped (The Moscow Times, 2016) and has a personnel size of 340,000 (Falaleev, 2016: 7; Sozaev-Guriev, 2016: 2). Its sheer size highlights that the Kremlin learnt from the failure of Bankova and the small size of the Berkut that made it difficult for Bankova to counter the Euromaidan. Like the Cossacks and Anti-Maidan, RosGvardiya is a direct lesson from the Euromaidan. As with the other two,

the RosGvardiya was created because the Kremlin believed it lacked the necessary coercive capacity to counter future protests.

EXTERNAL ELEMENTS OF THE SECOND PREVENTIVE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Having addressed the internal aspects of the second preventive counter-revolution, I will investigate its external elements. Believing that hegemonic actors like the United States and the EU were involved in financing and planning the Colour Revolutions, Arab Spring, 2011-2012 protests and the Euromaidan, the Kremlin perceived that in order to protect the regime, the second preventive counter-revolution needed to take this policy abroad. Attempts to take the preventive counter-revolution abroad had been made before the Arab Spring, 2011-2012 protest and Euromaidan, but it is only really after these events that the Kremlin instigated a preventive counter-revolution abroad. The need to counter the West in the West is seen in the 2013 statement by Chief of the General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov, that Russia should engage with media and exploit political opportunities to counter the West, which had been using similar tactics since the Colour Revolutions (Gerasimov, 2013).

Earlier channels had been attempted in the first decade of the 2000s, but the external aspect of the preventive counter-revolution only truly appeared in the 2010s. In 2008, the Kremlin had created the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation (IDC) when at an EU-Russia summit in Lisbon, Putin (2007) argued that the United States supported NGOs in Russia to instigate regime change. To respond to the West in kind, the IDC was set-up to write reports on the failings of Western elections and human rights abuses. However, after the three protests of 2010 to 2014, the IDC became another mouthpiece of the Kremlin's position on the Ukrainian war, the 2017 French presidential elections and Brexit (Vendil Pallin and Oxenstierna, 2017: 36-37). While the IDC has largely failed, it is still an example of learning from success, even if the perception of U.S. success with NGO funding in Russia is incorrect.

Another organisation existing before the revolutions of 2010 and 2014 was Russia Today[18]. This is Russia's international television channel, which gives the Russian state

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[18] Its name was changed to RT in 2009.

view of the world to an international audience. Originally envisaged as a soft power tool to show Russia's cultural contributions, but after the Russo-Georgian war, it transformed from a defensive capacity to offensive capabilities (Van Herpen, 2016: 72). After the Russo-Georgian war, Putin (2008) stated that Russia had lost the information war to the "propaganda machine of the West.". While it had beaten the Georgian army, it appeared the aggressor. In 2013, Putin (2013b) told RT "to break the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon media."

While RT has existed since 2005, its rapid expansion after 2008 brought it into contact with a wider Western audience. RT became a hard propaganda tool and its maxim of "Question More" calls for Western audiences to question the actions of their own politicians (Yablokov, 2015: 301; Shekhovtsov, 2018: 134). It has been adept at continuing the Soviet practice of the echo chamber (Wilson, 2016)[19] and it uses conspiracy theories presented as news items, while also giving fringe politicians the opportunity to distort truth (Pomerantsev, 2015: 56-57; Orttung and Walker, 2014; Van Herpen, 2016: 72-73; Pomerantsev and Weiss, 2014; Reichardt, 2015; Shekhovtsov, 2015a; 2015b; Scherr, 2011; Miller, 2014). The change from soft power tool to propaganda instrument occurred particularly after 2013 and can be attributed to learning from the Arab Spring and 2011-2012 protests.

To protect the Kremlin at home the second preventive counter-revolution has taken on a forceful external element; categorised as intervention in the domestic affairs of other states. By weakening these states, the Kremlin hopes that the West will be unable to continue its alleged tactics of regime change in Russia. Therefore, tactics like the use of trolls are increasingly apparent. They are used to twist Western messages and promote the Kremlin's discourse to new audiences. Although existing since the early days of Putin's first presidency, since the Euromaidan, pro-Russian trolls particularly have become more vocal. They join social networks and Western newspaper comments sections to post messages online praising Russians actions, denigrating those of the West and criticising the actions of Western politicians (Trifonova, 2016: 1; Klishin, 2015). The Kremlin has been fortunate that American

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[19] The echo chamber is stating something continuously until the truth becomes lost.

politics has become increasingly polarised, allowing pro-regime trolls to expand these fissures (Stewart et al. 2018).

Another aspect of the external element of the Kremlin's second preventive counter-revolution is the support given to radical fringe European political parties either through financial means or with political connections. Not all of the supported political parties are peripheral with Jobbik, the Front National, Alternative für Deutschland, the United Kingdom Independence Party and the Northern League all having close – but not equally close – ties to the Kremlin (Gressel, 2017). Each plays a prominent role in the domestic politics of their countries. While the majority are right-wing parties, the Kremlin is not ideologically choosy, having links to far-left parties too[20]. Believing that the West supports opposition politicians in Russia, the Kremlin has reciprocated with its support to radical parties. Support for these parties draws attention away from what Russia is doing in other areas, currently in the Azov Sea, or in Ukraine in general. It also is a useful way to discredit these countries and to weaken them in the hope that they will be unable to continue their perceived encroachment in Russia.

This leads to another aspect of the external elements of the second preventive counter-revolution, the interference in elections. Believing that the United States has interfered in Russian elections, the Kremlin has reciprocated; by this logic, if Western actors can interfere, the Kremlin can respond[21]. For instance, there are allegations that the Kremlin interfered in elections and referenda like the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and the 2016 Brexit referendum. While evidence remains limited, there is growing data from Twitter pointing Russian trolls influencing the Brexit referendum (Burgess, 2018). While there is uncertainty as to how effective the Russian attempt was at influencing the Brexit referendum, about 16,000 and 45,000 Tweets were sent from accounts linked to Russian sources in the days preceding the referendum (Kuchler and Ram, 2017; Lomas, 2017). There are certain links between Russian elements and leave campaigners that only appeared after the referendum (Cohen, 2018).

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[20] Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man – Associate Professor at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, 04/11/2016, Moscow.
[21] Interview with Ekaterina Shul'man.

The Brexit referendum was a prelude to the 2016 U.S. presidential elections (Lomas, 2017). According to Facebook, 150 million profiles on Facebook and Instagram could have been inundated with Russian propaganda (Lawler, 2018). Gunther (2018) contends that four percent of voters who voted for Barack Obama in 2012 were dissuaded by fake news to not vote for 2016 Democratic Party presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, which was enough to ensure a Donald Trump victory. Of course, these voters may not have been committed Democrats and may not have been susceptible to fake news, but the sheer variety of fake news sources especially on Facebook – where many Americans got information – was acute (Guess et al. 2018). Groups affiliated to the Russian authorities employed Cambridge Analytica to get information on millions of Facebook users to target them with advertisements on the elections (Singer, 2018). There are pointers to Russian military intelligence being involved in hacking vote counts (Bershidsky, 2018). There is ample evidence that the Kremlin or affiliated groups were involved in influencing the 2016 U.S. presidential election (CBSNews.com, 2018). The Kremlin's fake news campaign was helped by links to the Trump campaign, but it highlights the Russian attempts to do to the United States what the Kremlin believed the United States was doing to Russian elections.

Finding evidence on Russian interference and highlighting links to key individuals in the United Kingdom and the United States remains difficult to prove conclusively, but there is growing evidence that the Kremlin attempted to interfere. Believing that the United States and EU Member states had interfered in Russian elections, the Kremlin took the second preventive counter-revolution abroad to protect Russia from further attempts by hegemonic entities like the United States and the EU to create a revolution in Moscow. As with other factors in the external aspect of the second preventive counter-revolution, Kremlin attempts to intervene in the elections of others was an effort to coup-proof the regime domestically.

CONCLUSION

The second preventive counter-revolution has seen some changes from its first incarnation. There is an external element to the second manifestation, with the perception that Western intervention in Russia should be countered and by weakening the West, the Kremlin is better able to protect itself. While the first

preventive counter-revolution did serve as an example for the second – and lessons were indeed taken – learning was principally adaptation to the three protests mentioned. The need to restrict the Internet and the build-up of coercive forces are the two main lessons taken from these events.

The Kremlin drew a number of lessons after the Arab Spring, 2011-2012 Russian protests and the Euromaidan. Drawing on lessons from the first preventive counter-revolution – which countered a potential Colour Revolution in Moscow – the second version adapted these lessons for the present, especially in regards to shoring up the domestic arena and stopping a potential Russian Spring or Moscow Maidan. However, the Kremlin drew on lessons from another success. In the mind of many Russian elites, Western governments had since the Colour Revolutions tried to foment revolution in Russia. Therefore, the Kremlin learnt from the West the best practices to achieve this, adapting these practices for use in the West to protect the Kremlin. This makes the second preventive counter-revolution innovative. It is an example of learning from internal and external success.

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