

NO VIOLENCE!

The probability of achieving regime change through peaceful protests is almost twice as high as through bloody uprisings. This presents positive perspectives for the Russian demonstrations.

Non-violent revolutions do not always remain non-violent, as demonstrated by the uprisings in Egypt, Libya and Syria during the Arab Spring. Yet peaceful movements which seek to bring about regime change are often successful. They toppled illegitimate regimes during the post-Soviet "colour revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine. They ended apartheid in South Africa, having previously brought to an end "bourgeois Socialism" in East Germany. Non-violent movements overcame British rule in India and Malawi and brought down authoritarian regimes in Chile, the Philippines and Portugal.

Recent research has found that the success of non-violent confrontations depends in particular on one key factor: demonstrators taking a conscious decision in favour of non-violence. The research shows that the probability of full or partial regime change being achieved through peaceful protests is more than twice as high as through violent confrontations. Yet the outcome of civil resistance also depends on the methods used in practice. It is important to question the legality of the regime and deprive it of its capabilities and

material resources. At the same time, space must be created for dissenting views and the unity and clear goals of the movement maintained. It would seem that the most important thing for a protest movement seeking regime change is to win over decisive sections of the police and army. This has been demonstrated by the movement in Tunisia on the one hand and that in Syria on the other. For a government which can count on the unreserved loyalty of its troops is able to quell even the strongest of public protests. Yet this is only possible through a great deal of bloodshed, whilst half-hearted or ineffective attempts to quell dissent tend to actually aid the protesters in the achievement of their aims.

In order to circumvent state television, which merely spouts the official line, and overcome the huge distances between Russian cities, demonstrators are relying in particular on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. In this, they are no different to the Arab Spring activists. In light of these facts, how positive are the perspectives of the current Russian protest movement? So far, it has done many things right. It has concentrated

on one single demand: the call for fair elections. It has brought together liberals, communists, nationalists and otherwise apolitical citizens in a broad coalition, despite the strong animosities and potential divisions between these groups. And it has paid attention to the most important core element which legitimises demonstrations and lends them popularity across the world: it has remained peaceful. ■



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