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## Destabilization of ex-Soviet republics after Russia's invasion of Ukraine



**Sources:** A l'encontre

*In September this year, the security situation in the Caucasus and Central Asia saw a dramatic escalation of violence.*

On September 12, Azerbaijani armed forces launched a massive attack in six different directions inside the territory of neighboring Armenia. After 48 hours of fierce fighting, nearly 300 people were killed (in official figures: 207 Armenian soldiers and 80 Azeris).

In the same period, from September 14 to 20, and about 3,000 Kilometers further east, violent clashes took place in the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, southeast of the Fergana Valley. The death toll is controversial, but the numbers officers exceed one hundred, while only on the side Kyrgyz from the border 140,000 people were evacuated.

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Numerous analysts have linked the outbreak of violence in the Caucasus and Central Asia with the weakening of Russia following the war in Ukraine. While Putin's initial plan was to occupy Ukraine and strengthening Russian influence in the post-Soviet space, a Commentator has written that "Moscow actively accelerates the decline of its influence throughout Eurasia, including the former Soviet countries of the southern Caucasus and Central Asia". Marlene Laurelle, in an article published in *Foreign Affairs*, it has even gone further: not only Russia loses influence in the post-Soviet space, but "it does not seem which can continue to serve as a guarantor of regional security for the regimes in the region [...] and various powers – mainly China and Turkey – they have everything to gain."

The weakening of Russia's position in the Caucasus and Central Asia has been accompanied by information according to which Russia was going to withdraw troops from their bases in these post-Soviet republics to deploy them in Ukraine. For example, in September, new reports They argue that Russia had withdrawn about 1,500 military personnel from just Tajikistan. In other words, because of the current war in Ukraine, The Russian military has been weakened and its influence on the ground has greatly diminished.

Two issues need to be clarified. First, conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia date back long before the invasion Russian from Ukraine. The most recent clashes in the Caucasus are the replicas of the 2020 Karabakh war, when Azerbaijan launched a new offensive against Armenian forces deployed in Karabakh and in Armenia. In addition, the Karabakh conflict has a prehistory that sinks its roots in the period of collapse of the USSR, since this conflict It erupted in 1988, when the Armenian population of the region requested a change of status of its *autonomous region*, a claim that led to an all-out war when Armenia and Azerbaijan acceded to independence (1992-1994).

Also, already in the spring of 2021 there were clashes border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, i.e. before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, causing dozens of casualties. In addition, the valley of Fergana has been the scene of rivalries in relation to its natural resources such as land and water, generating tensions inter-ethnic relations due to the emergence of international borders that date from the last years of the USSR.

The second clarification needed is this: Russia was not the guardian of peace, not a part that favored the resolution of Conflicts. In fact, Russia tried to maintain its influence by seeking to establish a balance between the opposing parties, as it did also in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The military presence Russian in Armenia did not

prevent Azerbaijan from launching the Second World War Karabakh. When this game of equilibrium is not possible, Russia opts for direct military intervention, as in Georgia in 2008. There is also no than demonizing Russia's role in conflicts too much post-Soviet. Local actors are also responsible for the Transforming political tensions and problems into conflict Armed.

### **The war in Ukraine and the end of Putin's authoritarian model**

By invading Ukraine, Putin has eroded the two foundations of his authoritarian regime. The first was the projection of force, often associated with military force. Putin vowed to make Russia again a world power and earn the *respect* of the West, over all from the U.S. Official Russian propaganda is oriented in this direction, with images of new war machines, military parades in the Red Square and Russian military (particularly air) campaigns in Syria. However, the Russian leadership was also aware of its inferiority with respect to US military power, hence the insistence on the doctrine of *hybrid warfare*. By invading Ukraine, Putin has weakened the pillars of his authoritarian regime.

Every authoritarian system is in fact based on a tacit agreement with the population. In Putin's case, it was about ensuring *stability* in exchange for confiscation of the public sphere. The years of instability during two previous presidencies – Mikhail's – Mikhail's Gorbachev with his *perestroika* and that of Boris Yeltsin with his Endless transition – produced the weariness of the Russian population with the changes. Putin promised that there would be no more changes, but stability –including an end to essential internal reforms–, and In return, the population had to be apolitical. With his war in Ukraine, and especially with mass mobilization, Putin undermines a Second pillar of his authoritarianism.

Finally, the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is qualitatively different from the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014. Putin then managed to generate a wave of enthusiasm nationalist that served to make *public opinion* forget the presidential elections of 2012, in which the *exchange of chairs* between Putin and Medvedev had upset a part of the electorate.

After having cultivated patiently, for about twenty years, an official semblance of strength and conservatism, Putin has already been defeated in his war against Ukraine. When the opposition citizen inside Russia is banned and faces a harsh repression, many Russians vote with their feet: more than 700,000 They have left the country since the *special operation* began.

### **Regional conflicts and competition between great powers**

The defeat in Ukraine will undoubtedly reduce Russian influence in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. By way of comparison, in January of this year the Kazakh elite called for Russian military intervention to quell an internal revolt. After the invasion of Ukraine, the Kazakh elite is more cautious of Putin and his expansionist project, than questions the sovereignty of post-Soviet states, not just that of Ukraine.

The invasion of Ukraine and the Russian failure already draw the contours of Putin's succession. Russia will be greatly weakened, as will its army, and its international influence will be diminished. In addition, the money-making machine on which Putin's stability was based – the Oil and gas exports – will be drastically reduced due to Western sanctions. The Russian military could try to retreat in the wake of its failure in Ukraine, while the elite Politics could take an increasingly isolationist approach. After Putin, Russia must recover two decades of reforms that Putin has refused to carry it out.

A weaker and more isolationist Russia does not imply that conflicts in the Caucasus, in Central Asia or in the Middle East will find an easier solution. We already see a strengthening of competition between great powers in the Caucasus, whose strategic importance as Corridor between Asian economies and European markets does not leave to grow. Nor can it be thought that Russian influence will disappear in these regions. Even a weaker Russia will remain an actor important in Russia's own neighboring territories.

Source: <https://alencontre.org/europe/russie/apres-linvasion-de-lukraine-par-la-russie-une-vague-de-destabilisation-du-caucase-a-lasie-centrale.html>

Translation: **south wind**

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