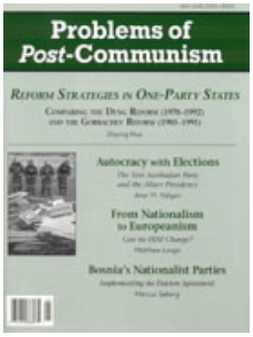

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End of the Line for the Commonwealth of Independent States

Paul Kubicek

Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States served as a political and economic life-preserver. Now, more confident, the member states can move about, explore new options, and not worry so much about sinking.

By 1998, it looked as if the curtain would come down on the six-year run of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Two Russian analysts of the organization opined that the CIS, with its "multiple, helpless structures," had been reduced to a "fiction," an entity that only creates "an illusion of commonality in the post-Soviet space."[1] Russian foreign minister (now prime minister) Evgenii Primakov, reviewing his year's work, admitted that integration processes within the CIS "leave much to be desired."[2] Even stalwarts of deeper integration, such as Belarusian president Aliaksandr Lukashenka, lamented the fact that the CIS has become little more than a talking shop stuck in a deep crisis.[3] All members recognize that if the CIS is to survive, it must be thoroughly reformed. Yet there is little consensus on how this might be done, and the assistant chair of the Russian Duma's Committee for CIS Affairs even declared that "Moscow itself does not have its own vision for the future development of the organization."[4]

These expressions markedly contrast with the sentiments expressed when the CIS was established in December 1991 by the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Then, its creation was hailed as a major, albeit imperfect, achievement that would mitigate the centrifugal forces ripping the old union apart. Boris Yeltsin declared that the new organization would foster the "dynamic development" of ties among the new sovereign states. The failure to form the CIS would, in his words, "doom people to new sufferings and plunge the new states into chaos."[5] Armenia and the Central Asian states rushed to join, for fear of being excluded from a "Slavic Union."[6] In its first few months of life, a host of

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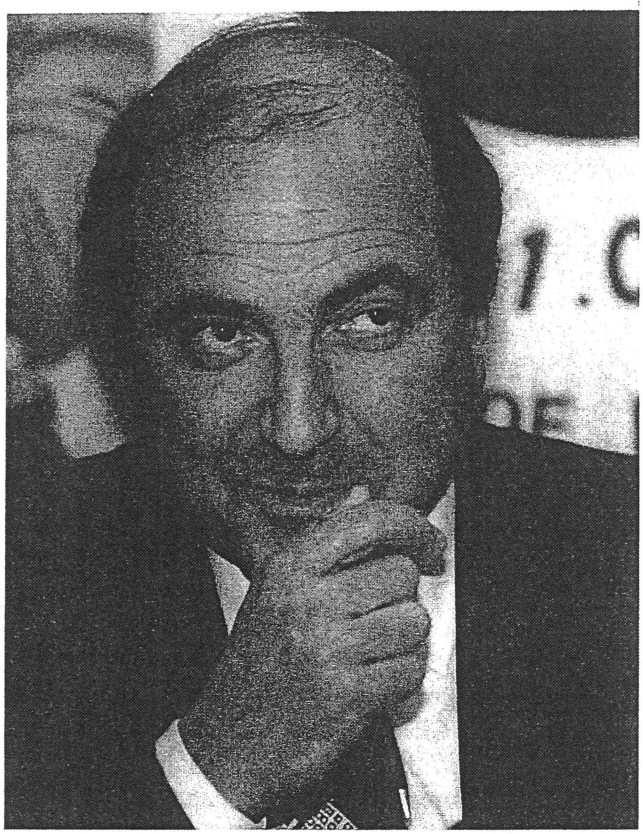

Russian financier Boris Berezovsky was appointed executive secretary of the CIS in 1998. He is widely believed to have bankrolled Yeltsin's 1996 re-election and championed Viktor Chernomyrdin's failed effort to recapture the prime ministership in August 1998. (AP Photo/Misha Japaridze)

agreements among CIS members were signed to preserve old ties and build new ones.

Today, however, this enthusiasm has waned, and movement in the other direction is gaining momentum, as the CIS is held at arm's length even by some of its former advocates. What happened to the CIS? What are the primary causes for its infirmities? Can it weather the latest storm and emerge as a real vehicle for cooperation and integration among its members? What would its failure portend for post-Soviet states? This article addresses these questions, focusing in particular on how recent developments have dramatically dimmed the prospects for the CIS.

Building Institutions

Anyone who would bemoan the state of the CIS today must first admit that the CIS had problems from the very beginning. Its most basic ideals, such as respecting state sovereignty, renouncing force or coercion to resolve conflicts, and integrating and coordinating economic programs, have consistently been breached more than practiced.

Problems began almost immediately. Ukraine, one of the founding members, ratified the initial statutes, but added twelve reservations on such issues as maintaining a single currency, free movement of peoples, national armies, and foreign policy. The obvious intent was to ensure national sovereignty and prevent the CIS from becoming only a "kinder, gentler" version of the old union. Both Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk and the nationalist opposition viewed the CIS with great suspicion. It was obvious that Kyiv and Moscow had very different views of how to shape the post-Soviet order, and it was legally debatable whether in fact Ukraine really was a CIS member. Meanwhile, Moldova never even ratified the founding statutes, making its status continuously nebulous, and Azerbaijan pulled out of the CIS in October 1992.

Throughout its life CIS decision-making, such as it is, has functioned along the principle of "consensus of interested parties," meaning that one can associate or not with CIS agreements however one sees fit.

Despite these questions of membership, the CIS had a busy first year, as intergovernmental bodies met and more than 250 documents and accords were drafted under the aegis of the CIS. The problem, however, was that many were left unratified by members or simply not implemented, since the CIS itself had no mechanism to carry out collective decisions and no charter to define its organizational structure. Some important documents, such as the Treaty on Collective Security, were signed by only a handful of members, and throughout its life CIS decision-making, such as it is, has functioned along the principle of "consensus of interested parties," meaning that one can associate or not with CIS agreements however one sees fit. Needless to say, this has hampered the development of the CIS as a cohesive bloc. On the economic front, trade targets for 1992 among the states were not met, and in several instances states stopped shipping goods to one another because of payment problems. Coordinating economic reforms proved utterly impossible. Not only did leaders and parliaments in various states have different preferences for reform and not consult one another on their economic programs, but policy in the leading state, Russia, was subject to continual fluctuations in 1992–93. Despite the numerous smiles, handshakes, and declarations of productive meetings and discussions made by various political figures, by the end

of 1992 the "slow but steady decomposition of the integrative nucleus" was evident.[7]

In order to remedy many of these shortcomings, a new CIS charter was proposed at the January 1993 CIS summit in Minsk. This charter was envisioned to be something akin to the Treaty of Rome or even the Maastricht treaty, as it would create supranational bodies and authorize them to oversee integration on a variety of questions. It was marketed as a "litmus test" to determine who really supported integration. Not surprisingly, Ukraine balked at the very idea. One Ukrainian official stated, "We don't want to have any suprastate structures playing the role of a 'drill sergeant' who would give orders to the Commonwealth countries."[8] Turkmenistan's president, Sapurmarad Niyazov, also suggested that the charter was inopportune and illusory and refused to sign it. Others lodged various complaints (e.g., Uzbekistan on human rights, Belarus on collective security), and eventually the document itself was so watered down that it did not oblige members to do anything. Moreover, like previous documents, it was internally contradictory—promising in Article 3 non-interference in one another's internal and external affairs, but also creating agencies to coordinate foreign and domestic policy. Ultimately, although more bodies were created to promote coordination in various sectors, the charter proved to be more a declaration than a reality, as promises of closer coordination were not realized.

A case in point was the September 1993 Treaty on Economic Union, which was to be the first stage in the establishment of a genuinely comprehensive common market. This was followed by a declaration in April 1994 to create a free-trade zone, and in October 1994 members created an Inter-State Economic Committee, hailed as the first truly supranational CIS organ and billed as a rough equivalent to the European Commission. However, in practice CIS members were moving not closer together, but further apart. In 1993, failure to establish a payments union and coordinate currency emissions led to the collapse of the "ruble zone" as Russia's partners printed their own currencies. Because of interrepublic debts, Russia began to cut back on energy deliveries to other CIS members. Trade among states continued to fall, and coordination of economic policies proved impossible. In addition, many accused Moscow of coercion and interference in their internal affairs, and more nationalist Russian rhetoric (see below) also made many uneasy. Suffice it to say that CIS-wide economic union remains a mirage.

There would, however, be more efforts to revive the CIS. In June 1994, Kazakstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, a staunch advocate of integration, proposed the creation of a truly federal "Eurasian Union" based on principles of equality among states. This idea was widely rejected. President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan called it "populist" and "not well thought out," while an official Uzbek paper claimed it was nothing more than "sheer gibberish."[9] Moscow's response was more muted, but it was clear that Yeltsin also had little enthusiasm for this plan, perhaps because it would limit Russia's room to maneuver vis-à-vis other former Soviet states. In 1996, Nazarbaev drafted another program, "Integration 2000," but it too went nowhere.

A Brief History of the Commonwealth of Independent States

December 8, 1991	Agreement on dissolution of the USSR and creation of the CIS approved by leaders of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine
December 21,1991	CIS formally established among eleven former Soviet republics
December 1991 and February 1992	Initial CIS Summits held in Minsk
May 1992	Tashkent Collective Security Treaty signed by six members at CIS summit
September 1992	CIS Summit in Bishkek begins discussion of creating CIS institutions
December 1992	CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly formed
January 1993	CIS Charter proposed at Minsk summit, later approved in May
June–October 1993	Russian involvement suspected in coup in Azerbaijan and Abkhazian Gamsakhurdian offensive in Georgia. Azerbaijan rejoins and Georgia joins the CIS.
September 1993	Agreement on Economic Union signed
April 1994 CIS	Summit in Moscow. CIS free-trade zone announced.
October 1994	Inter-State Economic Committee Formed
January 1995	Customs Union signed among Russia, Belarus, and Kazakstan. Kyrgyzstan joins in March 1996.
February 1995	CIS Summit in Almaty
January 1996	CIS Summit in Moscow. Hopes for more integration are not realized.
March 1996	Russian Duma denounces dissolution of USSR and formation of CIS
April 1996	Russian-Belarusian Union Treaty signed
October 1997	CIS Summit in Chişinău. Criticism of Russia much more discernible and GUAM grouping is formed.
April 1998	After delays, CIS summit held in Moscow. Financial mogul Boris Berezovskii appointed CIS executive secretary.

Many Russian policymakers and citizens want the CIS to become a reconstituted USSR under Russian control. Here an elderly hard-liner holds a portrait of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, with a pro-communist slogan in the background, at a rally in Moscow, Friday, December 8, 1995. (AP Photo/Misha Japaridze)

By 1996, a customs union among Russia, Belarus, Kazakstan, and Kyrgyzstan had been formally declared, but agreements on forming a common tariff structure were only signed in January 1998. Nazarbaev's proposal to turn this "group of four" into a common, CIS-wide economic space along the lines of the European Union was rebuffed by both Yeltsin and Lukashenka. While it is easy for leaders to talk about deeper integration, objective conditions make it very difficult to transform words into real programs. In a frank admission, Yeltsin told fellow CIS heads of state in 1996 that since 1991 the states had traveled "different distances" in their economic transformation, and that this seriously impeded cooperation in investment, trade, and production.[10] Yet recent data reveal that CIS members' trade with Russia has declined, while their trade with the outside world is appreciably growing.[11] If interstate trade is taken as the main indicator of integration, what does this say about the CIS in the economic arena?

Overall, the CIS's record of accomplishment has not been very impressive. True, it may have helped facilitate a (largely) civilized multiple divorce of the former Soviet republics, but it has done remarkably little to build institutions for re-integration. With many leaders now saying that it cannot or should not have this function, the survival of the CIS seems doubtful. According to two Russian writers, the CIS is moribund, but is being kept on life support for fear of what could happen should it die. "More than anything," they suggest, "the leaders of CIS countries are artificially prolonging the days of the outer shell under the name 'Commonwealth' until they are adapted to the new world economic map, until they are not pre-occupied with the problems that require careful relations with Russia."[12]

Solving Conflicts, or Creating Them?

The CIS's failure to promote post-Soviet integration is magnified by its inability to solve many of the conflicts in the region. Ironically, while one of the organization's stated goals is to ensure political stability and peaceful settlement of disputes, the CIS has been the motivation behind various conflicts and is used as a cloak to disguise various forms of Russian intervention.

The original intention in December 1991 was to maintain a unified security structure in the post-Soviet region. This was rejected most noticeably in the case of Ukraine, which declared its intention to form its own national army. The problem was simple: Russia was most concerned with threats originating beyond the borders of the CIS, whereas Ukraine and other states saw the greatest threat coming from *within* the CIS, namely Moscow. They feared that a common military establishment would give Russia a means to re-establish the old union. Russia did conclude bilateral agreements with several member states that provided for Russian military bases and Russian soldiers to guard the external CIS border. But in June 1993, the CIS Joint Military Command, which always had nebulous powers, was quietly disbanded.

Greater and more prolonged attention has been given to the question of peacekeeping. In March 1992, ten members of the CIS signed an agreement on the principles for collective peacekeeping forces. These principles were in accordance with standard UN practice; namely, that deployment must be with the consent of the conflicting parties after a cease-fire has been effected, and that such forces must be neutral and forgo a combat role. However, no provisions for an actual force were created. With a variety of ongoing conflicts threatening to undermine regional security, it fell primarily to Russia to assemble peacekeeping forces, which it initially did outside the CIS framework.

Not surprisingly, such action aroused suspicion that the "peacekeepers," almost all Russian troops, were in fact serving Russian interests. The activities of Russian troops in Moldova, South Ossetia, and Tajikistan are well known. In all three cases, Russian intervention under the name of "peacekeeping" broke the cardinal rule of peacekeeping, which prohibits peacekeepers from siding with one of the combatants. Rather than monitor a cease-fire, these troops were used to create a peace on terms that would advance Russian interests.[13] In addition, the lines between a limited-scale peacekeeping operation and a full-fledged military operation have blurred, especially in the case of Tajikistan. This in turn runs the risk that Russia will become more a party to the conflict than a neutral arbiter. This can be seen in the Caucasus, where Russian efforts to mediate the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan have been disingenuous, with Moscow playing one side off against the other to make both more dependent on Russia.

In mid-1993, two additional cases in the Caucasus demonstrated how far Russia had repudiated the hallowed CIS principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of other member states. First, its hand could be seen in the coup that deposed Azeri president Abulfaz Elchibey, who had withdrawn Baku from the CIS, rebuffed Russian proposals on Nagorno-Karabakh, and turned to Turkey for support. Elchibey was replaced by Heydar Aliev, a former Soviet Politburo member, who almost immediately assuaged Russian concerns by joining the CIS and temporarily ending talks with Western companies on oil and pipeline development. The second case was Georgia, which had, under the leadership of Eduard Shevardnadze, steadfastly refused to join the CIS. The country was, however, embroiled in civil conflict, and in early 1993 fighting intensified in the region of Abkhazia. The Abkhazians clearly had Russian ground, air, technical, and political support. By July the Abkhazians and troops loyal to former president Zviad Gamasakhurdia were overrunning Georgian positions. Given little choice, Shevardnadze turned to Russia for help. In return for "facilitating peace" and offering Tbilisi some military assistance, the Russians extracted basing rights on the Black Sea and Georgia's affiliation with the CIS.

Less dramatically, Russia has also resorted to economic coercion to bring its CIS partners into line.[14] One of the leading targets was Ukraine. Besides disagreeing on the principles of the CIS, Kyiv and Moscow quarreled over the return of Soviet nuclear weapons to Russia, the status of Crimea, the division of the Black Sea Fleet, and rights for the 11 million ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Russia's greatest source of leverage is Ukraine's energy dependence. As Oles Smolansky discusses (elsewhere in this issue of *PoPC*), Russia began to charge world prices for fuel shipments to Ukraine, and eventually the Ukrainians piled up a $4 billion debt. Moscow proposed to cancel the debt in return for political concessions and even cut off supplies in mid-winter to put additional pressure on Kyiv. While these sanctions did harm to the Ukrainian economy, Kyiv refused to balk at what it called an "economic *diktat.*" Later Moscow placed trade restrictions on Ukrainian goods, in direct violation of stated CIS aims for freer trade. Despite the fact that Moscow held most of the cards, the Ukrainians refused to fold, fearing that any concessions might jeopardize their highly prized sovereignty.[15]

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In the case of Central Asia, Russia used its monopoly control over oil and gas pipelines to force its CIS "partners" to accede to many Russian demands regarding defense forces, access to energy deposits, and rights for ethnic Russians. In the case of Turkmenistan, in 1992–93 Russia cut off food supplies, curtailed trade, and severely limited Turkmen gas exports through Russian-controlled pipelines. Having little choice but to give in, Niyazov signed defense agreements with Russia, granted dual-citizenship rights to ethnic Russians, and entered into a "strategic partnership" with Moscow. Kazakstan was also held hostage by Russia, as Moscow limited Kazakstani oil exports through Russian pipelines. Faced with economic disaster, Nazarbaev gave in to Russian demands, including equity shares in oil and gas fields and greater legal protections for ethnic Russians. By the middle of 1996, Russia had a hand in every major energy project in Kazakstan.

Toward the end of 1993, Russia began to justify its actions by claiming "special rights" in the so-called near abroad, a claim that flaunted the basic principles of the CIS. This was most clearly expressed in a manifesto by Andranik Migranian, then a Yeltsin adviser. He proclaimed that the "entire geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union is a sphere of Russia's vital interest."[16] He made reference to the Monroe Doctrine and contended that outside efforts to block integration among CIS members would be regarded as actions unfriendly to Russia.

As the first among equals, Russia would not countenance challenges to its supremacy from inside or outside the CIS.

This change in rhetoric was reflected by other government officials. Yeltsin demanded that the United Nations recognize Russia's hegemonic role in regional peacekeeping, but was turned down. Then-Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev also hardened his rhetoric, and then-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin predicted that the old union would be reborn, albeit on "normal, civilized, market principles."[17] Russian policymakers argued that only Russia could guarantee stability in the post-Soviet space, declaring that any attempt by other states to break free of the centripetal forces of re-integration was hopeless and lacked perspective.

Despite the rhetorical attention still paid to the CIS, this shift in Russian policy toward more active involvement in the near abroad revealed clearly what a fiction the CIS had become. Its basic principle of sovereign equality among states was repudiated by Moscow's new "Monroeski Doctrine." In 1996, the Russian Duma went so far as to declare that the accords ending the Soviet Union and establishing the CIS were "illegal," implicitly arguing that the old Moscow-centered union should be recreated. CIS summits were still held, and all the participants ritually reported that these led to "productive discussions," but bilateral relations between Russia and other former Soviet states overshadowed them. However, Russian heavy-handedness was resented by many CIS leaders, who began to seek new partners and new paths of development. While it took some time for this search to bear fruit, today new cracks and centrifugal forces are pulling the CIS apart.

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Blocs Within the CIS

While in many quarters there has been little enthusiasm for the CIS, several states have recognized the need to work with their neighbors and have formed groupings within and outside of the CIS. While such moves are understandable from the perspective of individual states, they drive wedges through the CIS as a whole.

Some of these moves are oriented toward Moscow and the ostensible goals of the CIS. As mentioned, Belarus, Kazakstan, and Kyrgyzstan have joined Russia in a customs union, although this union has yet to operate. Belarus, however, has gone much further than any other country in pushing re-integration with the old center. It was the first to enter the customs union in 1994, and in April 1996 Belarus agreed to form a new "Union (*soiuz*) of Sovereign Republics" with Russia that would further bind the two economically and politically. This new union is to be governed by supranational bodies, and both states are to bring their economic policies gradually in line with each other. While this arrangement has to date brought some tangible benefits to Minsk (including an increase in trade with Russia and cancellation of the republic's debts), it has been more costly to Moscow, which has been called upon to prop up the Belarusian economy through various subsidies and direct assistance. This fact has diminished Russian enthusiasm for a greater CIS economic union, which Moscow simply does not have the means to support. Moreover, because Belarus is such a laggard in reform, it has been impossible to realize the stated goal of true economic and monetary union. Many remain skeptical about what this "union" will in fact do. The *Economist* characterized it as a "silly" and "cynical" arrangement, convenient for domestic political reasons for both Lukashenka and Yeltsin. One Russian report suggested that it risks turning into simply a "union of *nomenklatura*" that would not constitute a good example for more CIS integration.[18] Besides Belarus, Armenia has also been loyal to Moscow, depending upon Russian economic and military support in its struggle with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1997 it concluded a more comprehensive defense agreement with Russia, as the latter has been keen to support its only solid ally in the region.

More interesting are the various regional integration efforts that pointedly exclude Moscow. The Central Asian states have been pursuing regional integration outside the CIS framework for years. These countries share a common history and religion as well as a host of economic, social, and environmental problems that could be solved through international cooperation. Some advocates of regional integration spoke optimistically of a new "Turkestan." This was not to be, for a variety of reasons, including rivalries among state leaders, the need to construct national political communities, and interference from Russia.[19] However, more modest progress has been made through the Central Asian Union (CAU), which unites Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.[20] According to one observer, the CAU works more effectively than the CIS, and it is becoming a powerful political and economic grouping, threatening to undermine Moscow's role in the region.[21]

Regional cooperation in the Caucasus has been slower to emerge, partly because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but also because the states in the area are all pre-occupied with domestic problems. However, Azerbaijan and Georgia have begun to work more closely together, particularly in constructing a pipeline from Baku to Supsa. This pipeline, initially opposed by Russia, opened with limited capacity at the end of 1998 and would bypass Russian territory, thus giving Moscow less leverage over oil production in the Caspian. Eventually, this might be the first link in a longer pipeline that would link up with undersea pipelines from Kazakstan and Turkmenistan and extend southward to the Turkish Mediterranean coast. In addition, some have given credence to the idea of a "Common Market of the Caucasus."[22] This organization, which would presumably also be open to Chechnya, Ossetia, and Dagestan, is still only being discussed and has far to go to be realized, but it if it were, its primary thrust would be to isolate Russia from developments—namely, pipeline construction—in the region.

A far more troubling and immediate challenge, from Moscow's perspective, is the GUAM grouping (Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova) formed in October 1997. This informal bloc within the CIS unites leading CIS "dissidents," all of which resent Russian interference in their internal affairs. Moreover, they are strategically arrayed along the Caspian–Black Sea corridor and have an obvious interest in developing oil and gas pipelines that would bypass Russia. Moreover, they are all drawing up a Western-leaning security agenda, pushing for more involvement in the region by NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) at the clear expense of Russia. Whether these states have the wherewithal to realize any common objective is a good question, but Ukraine is being called upon to take a more active role in regional conflict resolution to counter-balance Russia, and both Moldova and Ukraine plan to upgrade refineries and port facilities on the Black Sea. Some fear that GUAM may also attract the interest of Kazakstan and Uzbekistan, thereby isolating and confining Russia to the fringes of Eurasia.[23]

Geopolitical Pluralism

The institutional problems of the CIS, Russia's bid for dominance, and internal fissures within the organization are not all new. What is of more recent origin, and perhaps most disturbing from Moscow's perspective, is the emergence of what some have dubbed "geopolitical pluralism" in the post-Soviet space.[24] This refers to the interests and resources that outside actors, especially the United States, are now devoting to the region. This change became noticeable in late 1994–95, as the West began to doubt the prudence of its "Russia first" policy after Yeltsin's dissolution of the parliament in the fall of 1993, the strong performance of Vladimir Zhirinovskii's Liberal Democratic Party in the December 1993 parliamentary elections, and the 1994 invasion of Chechnya. This shift, of course, flaunts the self-promulgated Monroeski Doctrine. As S. Frederick Starr put it, for Russians it is like seeing the Indians take back the prairie.[25] The problem is that the Russians are in a poor political, economic, and military position to respond, and, because the post-Soviet states now have more international options, the pull of the CIS has been weakened.

The state that has gone furthest in placing itself in the American/Western camp is Ukraine. This, of course, constitutes a major turnaround, because, for the first three years of its existence as an independent state, Ukraine was a virtual international pariah as a result of its refusal to surrender its inherited strategic nuclear weapons to Russia. The country's fortunes changed in 1994, however, after Leonid Kuchma defeated Kravchuk in the presidential election. The irony is that Kuchma campaigned on a platform of "Fewer Walls, More Bridges" toward Russia.

While Kuchma has in fact improved relations with Russia on many questions, as shown by the conclusion in May 1997 of a long-awaited Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between the two states, his greatest foreign policy success has been in cultivating relations with the United States. After he took office, he embarked on an ambitious economic reform program and persuaded the parliament to agree to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. These moves won him both security guarantees and generous economic assistance. By 1997, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had supplied Ukraine with more than $3.5 billion, and the country had become the third-highest recipient—after Israel and Egypt—of U.S. foreign aid. IMF intervention also helped resolve the question of Ukrainian debts to Russia, thereby removing a serious political and economic concern of Kyiv's. Ukraine also eagerly joined NATO's Partnership for Peace initiative and endorsed NATO expansion, and its leaders have entertained the notion of applying for membership in the alliance in the future, should conditions warrant it—an obvious reference to Russia. Meanwhile, Ukraine has continued to distance itself from the CIS. By 1997, Ukrainian officials were claiming that it was no longer even an "associate" member, but merely an "observer" in the organization. This policy has earned Kyiv the accolades of the U.S. Senate, which passed a

resolution praising Ukraine for preventing the emergence of an organization to promote the re-integration of post-Soviet states. Now, with its independence more secure and with powerful new friends, Ukraine has taken the lead in the GUAM grouping, challenging Moscow's supremacy in the CIS.

Outside actors have also become more involved in the various disputes in the Caucasus. In 1994, the OSCE, rejecting the notion of a "Pax Russica," agreed to send monitors to Nagorno-Karabakh, and since then it has effectively eclipsed Russia as the arbiter of that conflict. The United States has also worked to find a political solution. Thus far, this remains elusive, even more so after the February 1998 ouster of Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrossian, but international action has diminished Russia's role and capacity to smolder the flames between the two adversaries. According to one Western analyst, "[OSCE and U.S. actions] show that local governments working with the West can moderate or even rebuff Russian neo-imperial pretensions."[26] President Aliev of Azerbaijan has also been vocal about pressing for NATO membership for his country. While this is unlikely in the foreseeable future, he has succeeded in garnering greater U.S. interest and support, particularly in plans to develop oil and gas reserves.

In Georgia, Shevardnadze is understandably suspicious of the 1,600 Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia, where a cease-fire has tenuously held since 1994. He has commissioned the parliament to review both Georgia's participation in the CIS and the presence of Russian troops in Abkhazia. While the Abkhazian conflict has received some attention from the United Nations and the OSCE, Shevardnadze is now endorsing the "Bosnian model" for the region. What this means is clear enough: Not only will separatism not be countenanced, but peacekeeping will fall to a UN-authorized NATO force. Whether NATO will get directly involved is unclear, but President Clinton has pledged that the United States will supply economic assistance and will play a greater role in resolving the conflict.

Beyond conflict resolution, foreign actors are also interested in the region because of the oil and gas bonanza promised by the vast reserves in and around the Caspian Sea. Estimates vary on their true extent, but many believe that by early in the next century the Caspian will be second to the Persian Gulf in oil production. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that international investors from the United States , Europe, Turkey, Japan, China, the Middle East, and Russia have been falling over one another to establish their stakes in what has been dubbed the "deal of the century." Billions of dollars have already been invested, and as much as $30 billion more has been promised.[27] But there is a distinctly geopolitical problem in harvesting the Caspian's riches: how to get the oil to market. The post-Soviet littoral states are landlocked, and existing pipelines, all of which traverse Russia, will be insufficient to meet expected output and will give Russia undue leverage over the economies of the concerned states. Western investors and governments have therefore backed pipeline projects extending westward into Georgia, possibly continuing into Turkey, and other discussions have mentioned schemes traversing Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, and Iran, although the latter remains a bête noire of Washington. While most of the pipeline projects are still under discussion, it is clear that the West is intent on being a serious player in the region's new "Great Game" and will be able to deny Russia monopoly control over the Caspian's resources.

Central Asia has also been the subject of great interest by foreign powers, including Turkey, Iran, and China. Originally, international cooperation with these states was limited, as Central Asian leaders were pulled toward Moscow. More recently, however, Central Asian leaders have begun to look for new international partners. Turkmenistan has concluded a deal for a gas pipeline to Iran, China and Kazakstan are seriously discussing an oil pipeline to the east, and Western investments in the region are increasing. High-level visits by U.S. officials have stressed the interest of their government and the promise of greater involvement in the region. NATO has also been active in Central Asia through its Partnership for Peace program, and in the summer of 1997 U.S. paratroopers were transported directly from North Carolina to Kazakstan for defense exercises, a projection of U.S. power that surely tweaked Moscow's nose. In January 1998, the U.S. Congress began debate on a "Silk Road Strategy Act" that would provide for a more active U.S. role in resolving conflicts, promoting economic reform and development, and securing membership for Central Asian states in more international organizations. By proclaiming such far-ranging interests in the region, Washington announced its intention to prevent Russian hegemony. From the Russian perspective, Moscow now sees itself as being "gradually pushed out of the region, both economically and militarily-politically."[28]

The result of greater outside involvement in the CIS states is clear. As Valerii Serov, a former Russian deputy prime minister, explained, the independent states "have become completely different in comparison with their situation in 1992, when they declared the goal of Commonwealth. [Now] they have the freedom of choice, with

whom to build relations, with Russia or with other states."[29] It seems plain now that joining the World Trade Organization, becoming more active in the Partnership for Peace, and appealing to the OSCE for assistance will be far more attractive than relying on Moscow and the economic "benefits" of closer ties to states with weak economies. Of course, it is not an either/or proposition: States can be in the CIS and still build relations with other states or international organizations. However, many are beginning to say more openly than ever that the CIS is no longer necessary, and some Russians worry that the "CIS, as an instrument of Russian influence is definitively losing its vitality."[30]

Forecast

Predicting political events, especially those involving the former Soviet states, is often tricky, but it appears that the CIS is on its last legs. True, it has weathered crises before, and its proponents continue to express hope for an eventual recovery from its current infirmities. However, it is unlikely to emerge as a powerful and effective vehicle for integration in the post-Soviet space. Many member states have little enthusiasm for the organization and, unlike the situation in 1992–93, find that they have a wider range of options in the world. They are making alliances among themselves that exclude Moscow, and they are building strategic and economic partnerships with other, more powerful countries. They are likely to confine the CIS to the barest essentials and would not support any measures that would grant it supranational powers. Some proponents of integration, of course, will continue to push forward with schemes like the Belarusian-Russian union and a customs union among interested states. Thus far, such moves have not borne much fruit. Moreover, they risk creating fractures or blocs within the CIS. While some may see a multi-layered or "multi-speed" CIS as perfectly natural, it risks reducing the CIS to a shell of an organization.

Perhaps, with some new innovative arrangements, the CIS can be saved. The problem, though, is twofold. First, no one—in Moscow, Minsk, or Akmola, let alone Kyiv or Baku—has a clear idea of what sort of structures might work. It is easy to speak of the need for reform, but, as CIS advocates are discovering, harder to spell out precisely what needs to be done.[31] The EU model is clearly a non-starter. Lukashenka's idea—create powerful institutions to implement and enforce all previous agreements and re-establish democratic centralism—is no better because it does not get around the question of sovereignty.[32] Something more akin to the North American Free Trade Agreement might be plausible, but this would obviously limit the areas of CIS jurisdiction and not require political institutionalization.[33] There probably would be little enthusiasm for an economic bloc among several weak economies when the rest of world beckons. At any rate, until there is a definitive concept of what is desirable and possible, the CIS will remain in its current state of limbo. However, it is unclear how much longer anyone will retain faith in its recoverability or reformability.

Second, the CIS is at a serious cross-roads. It has facilitated a largely peaceful break-up of the Soviet Union, but now must move on to something new and probably more challenging. Unfortunately, there is no theoretical guide or historical precedent for how one might move from a unified state to a confederation or federation of separate states. Given the power of nationalism and widespread concern about sovereignty in the various states, fears of Moscow's intentions, and the limited attractions of integration, it is hard to see how the CIS can succeed.

Debates over the future of the CIS, however, are beginning to look more and more academic and have acquired an air of desperation. The CIS has held together this long because of Russian efforts to preserve and expand it, and because of economic necessity. The post-Soviet states needed something to hold onto, much like someone learning to swim. Now more confident, they can move about, explore new options, and not worry so much about sinking. Yes, they might still want a life-preserver "just in case," so the CIS may not completely disappear. However, it will not be able to re-integrate or re-unify its twelve member states, which are gradually discovering that the only thing they have in common is having been part of the now-defunct Soviet Union. Moreover, as Migranian and Zatulin suggest, the claim that economic integration with Russia should be a top priority is beginning to ring hollow, as Russia has little to offer them.[34] In short, Russians may still preach the virtues of integration, but they lack the carrots, sticks, or convincing arguments to persuade others to re-invigorate the CIS. In the aftermath of the economic collapse in Russia in the summer of 1998 and the country's numerous troubles, it seems certain that less attention will be paid to the CIS, allowing the forces of disintegration to build up more momentum.

While many in Moscow are alarmed about what the possible end of the CIS means for Russia's geopolitical position, one might ask whether its likely disintegration is legitimate cause for Western concern as well. Might its collapse lead to more inter-regional conflicts, com-

plicate current peacemaking efforts, and undermine nascent economic progress in several states?

There is little reason to ring alarm bells, although one does hear them in Moscow. Currently, outside actors have taken much of the resolution in conflict resolution away from Russia/CIS, and it is worth recalling that Moscow-led efforts to produce a stable peace in many areas have borne little fruit. As for a possible economic collapse, it is important to note that all the states have diversified their international economic ties, and that CIS economic institutions have never worked well. Moreover, mutually beneficial ties can still be preserved and developed on a bilateral basis, as one sees in the case of Russia and Ukraine, whose leaders signed a ten-year economic agreement in early 1998. On the positive side, Russian democracy could be better consolidated once Moscow abandons its imperial pretensions.

The end of the CIS is imminent. It will take place not with a bang but a whimper, since throughout its life it has had, at best, a marginal impact on most of its member states. Its demise will be a sure sign that the former Soviet states are no longer wedded to the notion of the lost empire and forced to stumble along in lock-step. Its collapse will verify that the former Soviet space is characterized by political, economic, and social diversity, that Soviet successor states can fare better pursuing different paths in accordance with their own interests. At the same time, new opportunities will emerge for Western states to play a greater role in the region. These must be embraced, as the West has the political and economic wherewithal to offer the post-Soviet states much more than the CIS could.

Notes

1. Konstantin Zatulin and Andranik Migranian, "SNG posle Kishineva: nachalo kontsa istorii" (The CIS After Kishinev: The Beginning of the End of History), *Sodruzhestvo NG*, no. 1 (December 1997): 1–2.

2. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (December 24, 1997).

3. Aliaksandr Lukashenka, "Neobkhodima volia k konkretnym deystviiam" (The Necessary Will for Concrete Actions), *Sodruzhestvo NG*, no. 1 (December 1997): 3

4. *Nezavisiamaia gazeta* (December 18, 1997).

5. *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (December 13, 1991).

6. The Baltic states refused to join the organization, preferring to preserve as little as possible from the Soviet era. Azerbaijan and Georgia were long-time holdouts, but by the fall of 1993 the CIS encompassed all the remaining former Soviet republics.

7. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (January 26, 1993).

8. Vladimir Kryzhanovsky, in *Izvestiia* (January 21, 1993).

9. Cited in Boris Rumer, "Disintegration and Reintegration in Central Asia: Dynamics and Prospects," in *Central Asia in Transition: Dilemmas of Political and Economic Development*, ed. Boris Rumer (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), p. 51.

10. *Rossiiskie vesti* (January 20, 1996).

11. *Economic Bulletin for Europe*, vol. 49 (New York: United Nations, 1997), p. 61. Non- Russian CIS exports grew 16.8 percent in 1996 and 18 percent in the first half of 1997, whereas imports grew 35.2 percent and 16.2 percent respectively. Exports to Russia fell 14 percent in the first half of 1997, and imports fell 5 percent.

12. Zatulin and Migranian, "SNG posle Kishineva," p. 1.

13. See Michael Lucas, "Russia and Peacekeeping in the Former USSR," *Aussenpolitik* 46, no. 2 (1995): 146–56; and Maxim Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the 'Near Abroad,'" *Survival* 36, no. 2 (autumn 1994): 46–69.

14. Daniel Drezner, "Allies, Adversaries, and Economic Coercion: Russian Foreign Economic Policy Since 1991," *Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (spring 1997): 65–111.

15. Paul D'Anieri, "Interdependence and Sovereignty in the Ukrainian-Russian Relationship," *European Security* 4, no. 4 (winter 1995): 603–21. The Ukrainians discovered that they had one trump to play: Russian gas pipelines to Western Europe passed through Ukraine. They were able to siphon off some gas and threatened to close the pipeline entirely if Russian pressure became too severe.

16. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (January 12, 1994).

17. *Prism* (June 2, 1995).

18. "Alexander the Not-so-Great," *Economist* (April 13, 1996), p. 42; *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (December 30, 1997).

19. Paul Kubicek, "Regionalism, Nationalism, and *Realpolitik* in Central Asia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 49, no. 4 (June 1997): 637–55.

20. Turkmenistan is formally not a member, reflecting its foreign policy of "positive neutrality." However, it has expressed interest in the work of the organization.

21. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (December 20, 1997).

22. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (January 16, 1998).

23. Zatulin and Migranian, "SNG posle Kishineva." See also Sherman W. Garnett and Rachel Lebenson, "Ukraine Joins the Fray: Will Peace Come to Trans-Dniestria?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 45, no. 6 (November–December 1998): 22–32 .

24. This term originated with Zbigniew Brzezinski, and is used by Zatulin and Migranian, "SNG posle Kishineva."

25. *Washington Post* (September 22, 1997).

26. Stephen Blank, "Russia and Europe in the Caucasus," *European Security* 4, no. 4 (winter 1995): 625.

27. The World Bank has tracked private capital inflows in the region, which have gone up in all states, especially Kazakstan and Azerbaijan. In 1995, private capital inflow per capita was $30 in Kazakstan and $15 in Azerbaijan, compared with $7.5 per capita in Russia. See *World Bank Development Report, 1997* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1997), pp. 218–19. See also Jan Adams, "Pipelines and Pipe Dreams: Can Russia Continue to Dominate Caspian Basin Energy?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 45, no. 5 (September–October 1998): 26–36.

28. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (December 20, 1997).

29. Ibid.

30. Zatulin and Migranian, "SNG posle Kishineva," p. 1.

31. One might mention that the January 1998 CIS summit of heads of state was postponed, precisely because no one had come up with reasonable reform proposals, which had been the "homework" given to all of them at the previous Chişinău summit. Only three states—Belarus, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—even bothered to respond to Yeltsin's call for reform proposals.

32. Lukashenka, "Neobkhodima."

33. Andrei Zagorskii, "What Kind of CIS Would Do?" *Aussenpolitik* 46, no. 3 (1995): 263–70.

34. Zatulin and Migranian, "SNG posle Kishineva."