
Deadly Caucasus Avalanche

By Maxim Shevchenko
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An avalanche that buries a town starts from a single rock rolling down the mountain. It is like the single spark that sets a forest ablaze. When the avalanche is crashing down the side of the mountain, we do not spend a lot of time thinking about how it started. Our first instinct is to run away from the danger.

The Caucasus war is like the first rock of an avalanche. The end of the Commonwealth of Independent States is one of the most important and tragic consequences of the conflict. According to the differing opinions of its members, this organization was established either to allow for a civilized and peaceful divorce among former Soviet republics after the Belavezha Accords were signed in early December 1991, or to strengthening economic and political ties among these newly independent states. But neither has occurred in the nearly 17 years since the CIS was founded.

After war broke out between CIS members Russia and Georgia, the commonwealth played no role whatsoever as a mediator in the conflict. Moreover, the silence of individual key CIS figures -- namely, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko -- and the divisive rhetoric of others, such as Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, in the most tense and tragic days of the conflict testify to the paralysis and political demise of this organization.

As a result, Moscow has lost the right to be the main watchdog over the post-Soviet region, something it had largely enjoyed since the early 1990s.

Now, a new framework must replace the old one. This very much suits the aims of Washington's neoconservatives, who are interested in developing their model of "managed chaos" under which the whole world, with the exception of the United States, is mired in permanent wars and other local conflicts.

In this terrible world, a "New Atlantis" must manage the global chaos. It must divide, conquer and rule. The demise of the CIS helps pave the way for this nightmare called the new American global order.

Since the Georgian conflict put the last nail in the CIS coffin, this will have a direct impact on the balance of power in Eurasia. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, with China playing the predominant role, will inevitably replace the CIS as the leading regional organization.

This new realignment and shift of power centers could have the following consequences in Eurasia and the Middle East:

- China's increased power could mean an increased likelihood of conflict with India, the United States' key regional ally and the only real threat to China's predominance in the region.
- The U.S. and NATO presence in Afghanistan will be strengthened.
- The growing political crisis in Pakistan, fraught with civil war, will divert Islamabad's attention from the problem of Kashmir and draw it deeper into military conflict with the country's various tribal insurgencies.
- Iran will become increasingly isolated, and the chances of finding peaceful solutions to the "Iranian problem" will become increasingly difficult.

- Islamic opposition groups in Central Asia and China's Uyghur region will proliferate.

All of this significantly raises the likelihood of a large-scale Asian war. In comparison, the Russian-Georgian war will seem like a insignificant event.

The GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, consisting of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldavia and initially intended to be a rival to the Russia-dominated CIS, may increase in importance.

After Georgia's entry into NATO, which now appears inevitable, the organization will be transformed into a critically important outpost for a U.S. military presence in the region. The Georgian army will be rearmed according to modern U.S. and NATO standards, and U.S. planes will be able to strike Iran from Georgian airfields. In this scenario, Russia may have only two unpalatable choices to choose from -- either become a passive observer of U.S. expansion in its backyard or take firm action and prompt a direct conflict with the U.S. Army.

Just south of Georgia are the powder kegs of Kurdistan, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel, which can easily be transformed into new war zones. After the demise of the CIS, and in the absence of Russia's distinct vision of where it fits on the modern political map, the threat of a major global conflict seems more than real.

The South Ossetian war may be the first small rock of a merciless avalanche that leads to the next world war.
