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Address to the Nation on the Commonwealth of Independent States

1991-12-25

Good evening, and Merry Christmas to all Americans across our great country.

During these last few months, you and I have witnessed one of the greatest dramas of the 20th century, the historic and revolutionary transformation of a totalitarian dictatorship, the Soviet Union, and the liberation of its peoples. As we celebrate Christmas, this day of peace and hope, I thought we should take a few minutes to reflect on what these events mean for us as Americans.

For over 40 years, the United States led the West in the struggle against communism and the threat it posed to our most precious values. This struggle shaped the lives of all Americans. It forced all nations to live under the specter of nuclear destruction.

That confrontation is now over. The nuclear threat, while far from gone, is receding. Eastern Europe is free. The Soviet Union itself is no more. This is a victory for democracy and freedom. It's a victory for the moral force of our values. Every American can take pride in this victory, from the millions of men and women who have served our country in uniform, to millions of Americans who supported their country and a strong defense under nine Presidents.

New, independent nations have emerged out of the wreckage of the Soviet empire. Last weekend, these former Republics formed a Commonwealth of Independent States. This act marks the end of the old Soviet Union, signified today by Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to resign as President.

I'd like to express, on behalf of the American people, my gratitude to Mikhail Gorbachev for years of sustained commitment to world peace, and for his intellect, vision, and courage. I spoke with Mikhail Gorbachev this morning. We reviewed the many accomplishments of the past few years and spoke of hope for the future.

Mikhail Gorbachev's revolutionary policies transformed the Soviet Union. His policies permitted the peoples of Russia and the other Republics to cast aside decades of oppression and establish the foundations of freedom. His legacy guarantees him an honored place in history and provides a solid basis for the United States to work in equally constructive ways with his successors.

The United States applauds and supports the historic choice for freedom by the new States of the Commonwealth. We congratulate them on the peaceful and democratic path they have chosen, and for their careful attention to nuclear control and safety during this transition. Despite a potential for instability and chaos, these events clearly serve our national interest.

We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago. The challenge for us now is to engage these new States in sustaining the peace and building a more prosperous future.

And so today, based on commitments and assurances given to us by some of these States, concerning nuclear safety, democracy, and free markets, I am announcing some important steps designed to begin this process.

First, the United States recognizes and welcomes the emergence of a free, independent, and democratic Russia, led by its courageous President, Boris Yeltsin. Our Embassy in Moscow will remain there as our Embassy to Russia. We will support Russia's assumption of the U.S.S.R.'s seat as a permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council. I look forward to working closely with President Yeltsin in support of his efforts to bring democratic and market reform to Russia.

Second, the United States also recognizes the independence of Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan, all States that have made specific commitments to us. We will move quickly to establish diplomatic relations with these States and build new ties to them. We will sponsor membership in the United Nations for those not already members.

Third, the United States also recognizes today as independent States the remaining six former Soviet Republics: Moldova, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tadjikistan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. We will establish diplomatic relations with them when we are satisfied that they have made commitments to responsible security policies and democratic principles, as have the other States we recognize today.

These dramatic events come at a time when Americans are also facing challenges here at home. I know that for many of you these are difficult times. And I want all Americans to know that I am committed to attacking our economic problems at home with the same determination we brought to winning the cold war.

I am confident we will meet this challenge as we have so many times before. But we cannot if we retreat into isolationism. We will only succeed in this interconnected world by continuing to lead the fight for free people and free and fair trade. A free and prosperous global economy is essential for America's prosperity. That means jobs and economic growth right here at home.

This is a day of great hope for all Americans. Our enemies have become our partners, committed to building democratic and civil

societies. They ask for our support, and we will give it to them. We will do it because as Americans we can do no less.

For our children, we must offer them the guarantee of a peaceful and prosperous future, a future grounded in a world built on strong democratic principles, free from the specter of global conflict.

May God bless the people of the new nations in the Commonwealth of Independent States. And on this special day of peace on Earth, good will toward men, may God continue to bless the United States of America. Good night.

Note: The President spoke at 9 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. The address was broadcast live on nationwide radio and television.