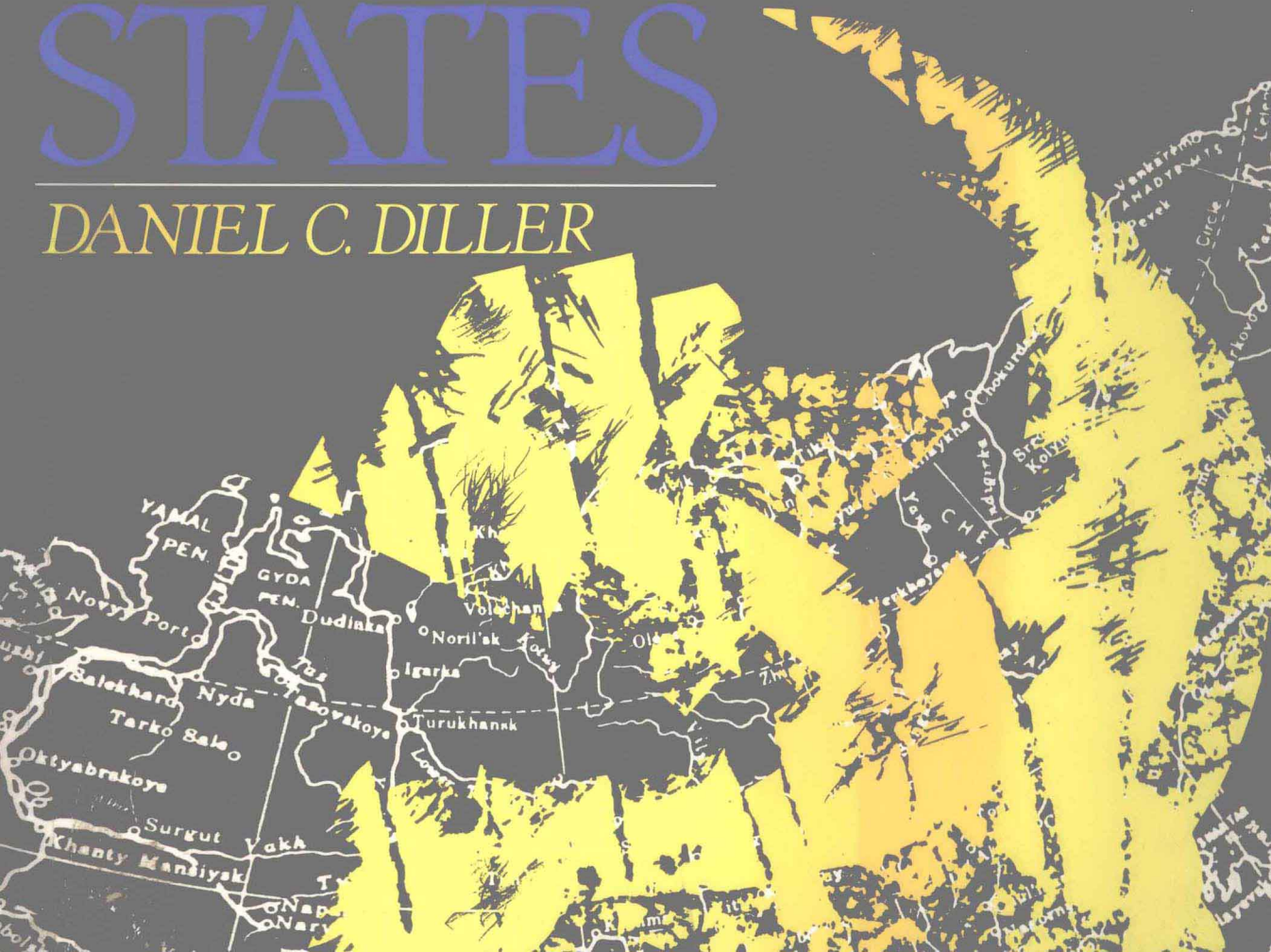


# AND THE INDEPENDENT STATES

DANIEL C. DILLER





# RUSSIA AND THE INDEPENDENT STATES

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Edited by

DANIEL C. DILLER



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RUSSIA AND THE  
INDEPENDENT STATES



## P R E F A C E

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*Russia and the Independent States* is published close on the heels of one of the most momentous events of the twentieth century. Over the course of a year and a half the world's last great empire was torn asunder by centuries-old national animosities and aspirations, the failure of the Soviet economic system, and a pervasive cynicism that rotted the foundations of Soviet political culture.

The ramifications of the Soviet empire's demise radiate throughout the world. On an individual level, employees of defense-related corporations in small-town America, sugar-cane growers in Cuba, and diamond merchants in South Africa are among millions of people affected by the breakup of the Soviet Union. On an epic scale, the international communist movement was dealt a knockout, the bipolar balance of power was shattered, and the omnipresent threat of massive nuclear war between the superpowers was vastly reduced.

Across the lands of the former Soviet Union the transformations are no less dramatic. The collapse left a tangled web of economic, political, and social interrelationships that will take the fifteen newly independent states decades to resolve.

*Russia and the Independent States* combines current analysis with extensive background to place the causes and implications of the revolution of 1991-1992 in historical context. The chronological format of Part I, topical arrangement of Part II, and regional focus of Part III provide different perspectives on the continuum of Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras.

Students of history will find *Russia and the Independent States* an invaluable reference source as well as a highly readable textbook. The appendix includes a detailed chronology of milestones from

1900 to the present; biographies of fifty influential leaders of the past and present; and a bibliography of authoritative information sources. A thorough index facilitates research. The maps that appear in this volume were commissioned and custom-drawn to illuminate the textual discussions.

The discussions that led to this text began in early 1991, several months after Congressional Quarterly published *The Soviet Union*, third edition. The breakneck pace of change in the USSR persuaded us of the need for a fourth edition. By the time the project was under way, the country had dissolved and the book had been renamed *Russia and the Independent States*. Despite the change in title, this text draws heavily on its predecessors. The sections on early Russian and Soviet history and the chronology through 1990 appeared in the third edition of *The Soviet Union*. The balance of the material, however, was drafted anew in mid-to-late 1992 in light of the seminal events that had taken place.

This book was produced by a talented team of editors and writers to whom I am greatly indebted. Associate editor Jerry Orvedahl gracefully shepherded the project throughout all its phases, oversaw the selection and acquisition of photographs and maps, and applied his own expertise of Russia and the independent states as the writer of Chapter 7. Associate editor John Moore, who was indispensable to this book and all three editions of *The Soviet Union*, provided sage advice and skillful editing. Contributing writers Dan Berg, Joel Levin, Ron de Paolo, and Sharon Werning brought a wealth of knowledge and insight about the former Soviet Union to the book. This text also reflects the efforts of those who established a legacy with the three editions of *The Soviet Union*.

1910

1920

## Domestic Events



**1918**—Tsar Nicholas II and his family are murdered by Bolsheviks.

**1918**—Bolsheviks sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, ending Russian participation in World War I.

**1917**—Russian Revolution results in the overthrow of the tsar and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

**1918–1920**—Bolshevik Red Army defeats opposing White forces in the Russian Civil War.

**1921**—Lenin initiates the New Economic Policy, promoting limited free enterprise as a means to rebuild the Soviet economy.

**1928**—Stalin introduces the First Five-Year Plan, which ends the New Economic Policy and calls for rapid industrial expansion and the reorganization of peasants into collectives.

**1922**—Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is declared.



## Leaders



**1917**—V.I. Lenin heads Bolsheviks and Russia as the chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars.

**1922**—Joseph Stalin becomes general secretary of the Communist party.

**1924**—Lenin dies; a power struggle between Joseph Stalin, Leon Trotsky, and others follows.

## World Events

**1914–1918**—World War I; Great Britain, France, Russia, and (beginning in 1917) the U.S. battle the Central Powers led by Germany and Austria-Hungary.

**1919**—Versailles Treaty settles World War I issues, imposes reparations on the defeated Central Powers, and creates the League of Nations.

**1929**—Stock market crash in the United States signals beginning of the Great Depression.



## 1930

1933—Soviet Union and the United States establish diplomatic relations.

1934—Stalinist purges begin.

1929—Stalin calls for the "elimination of the kulaks (wealthy peasants) as a class".

1929—Having emerged as the absolute ruler of the Soviet Union, Stalin exiles Trotsky from the USSR.



1933—Adolph Hitler comes to power in Germany.

1939—Germany and the Soviet Union sign a non-aggression pact, clearing the way for a German invasion of Poland.

1939–1940—Soviet Union defeats Finland in the "Winter War".

1936–1938—"Show Trials" are held to disgrace dozens of former Stalin rivals.

1939—Germany invades Poland, triggering World War II.

1941—Japanese attack Pearl Harbor.

## 1940

1940—Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia are annexed by the Soviet Union.

1941—Germany invades the Soviet Union.

1943—Soviets defeat German forces at Stalingrad.

1945—World War II ends with the defeat of Germany and Japan.

1945—United Nations charter is signed.

## 1950

1945—Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt meet at Yalta to discuss the composition of the postwar world.



1945–1948—Moscow oversees the establishment of pro-Soviet Communist governments in Eastern Europe.

1949—Soviets test their first atomic bomb.

1953—Stalin dies; a power struggle ensues.

1947—U.S. government launches the Marshall Plan.

1949—Civil war in China culminates with the victory of the Communists.

## 1960

1956—Soviet forces crush the Hungarian revolution.

1956—Nikita Khrushchev delivers his 'Secret Speech' denouncing Stalin at the Twentieth Soviet Communist Party Congress.

1953—Secret police chief Lavrentii Beria is arrested, tried, and executed on the orders of Stalin's successors, who fear his power and ruthlessness.

1957—Soviets launch *Sputnik*, the world's first space satellite.

1959—Khrushchev visits the U.S.

1960—Paris summit is undermined by the downing of an American U-2 spy plane over Soviet territory.

1961—Khrushchev meets President John F. Kennedy at Vienna summit.

1961—Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin becomes the first person in space.



## 1970

1968—Soviets invade Czechoslovakia to put down 'Prague Spring' liberalization movement.



1972—Brezhnev meets President Richard Nixon to sign the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.

1975—Moscow cancels the U.S.-Soviet trade pact after the U.S. Congress links trade privileges to freer Jewish emigration.

1955—Nikita Khrushchev becomes pre-eminent leader of the Soviet Union.

1957—Khrushchev overcomes a challenge to his authority by rivals known as the "anti-party group."



1964—Khrushchev is ousted by his colleagues; Leonid Brezhnev is chosen general secretary.



1977—Brezhnev is elected president, becoming the first Soviet leader to be head of state and general secretary at the same time.

1953—Korean War ends after three years of fighting.

1962—Cuban missile crisis.

1956—Great Britain, France, and Israel invade Egypt during the Suez crisis.

1964—U.S. Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution supporting presidential discretion in the use of force in Vietnam.

1969—U.S. astronauts land on the moon.

1967—Israel defeats Arabs in the Six-Day War.

1973—Paris Peace Agreement is signed, ending the U.S. combat role in Vietnam.



# 1980

# 1990

**1985**—Mikhail Gorbachev discusses arms control with President Ronald Reagan in Geneva.

**1987**—Gorbachev and Reagan sign the INF Treaty.

**1989**—Soviet troops complete their withdrawal from Afghanistan.

**1989**—Multi-candidate elections for the new Congress of People's Deputies are held in the Soviet Union.

**1991**—Failed hard-line coup hastens dissolution of Soviet Union into fifteen sovereign states.



**1983**—Soviet warplanes shoot down a Korean Airlines passenger jet that had strayed into Soviet airspace.

**1979**—Soviets invade Afghanistan to prop up a pro-Soviet government.

**1986**—Chernobyl nuclear disaster causes severe environmental damage.

**1990**—Communist Party of the Soviet Union renounces its monopoly on power.

**1992**—Commonwealth of Independent States formed by eleven of the fifteen former Soviet republics.



**1982**—Brezhnev dies; Yuri Andropov succeeds him.



**1984**—Andropov dies; Chernenko succeeds him.

**1985**—Chernenko dies; Mikhail Gorbachev succeeds him.



**1991**—Gorbachev resigns.

**1991**—UN-sanctioned coalition drives Iraq from Kuwait.

**1992**—Interethnic warfare in the former Yugoslav Federation escalates.

**1979**—Iranian Revolution brings Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to power.

**1981**—Martial law is declared by the Polish government in an effort to suppress the Solidarity labor movement.

**1989**—Eastern European Communist regimes fall.

**1990**—East Germany and West Germany reunify.



## CONTENTS

---

Preface	ix
Timeline	x
Introduction	1

### I RUSSIAN AND SOVIET HISTORY 9

#### 1. Imperial Russia and the Revolution 11

Establishing a Russian State	11
Rise and Fall of the Romanovs	14
Revolution of 1917	29
Establishing Bolshevik Rule	33

#### 2. Stalin Era 43

Prewar Foreign Policy	45
Domestic Policy	47
World War II	53
Cold War	59

#### 3. Khrushchev Era 63

De-Stalinization	64
1956 Foreign Policy Crises	66
Domestic Difficulties	69
U.S.-Soviet Relations	71
Sino-Soviet Relations	76
The Fall of Khrushchev	77

#### 4. Brezhnev Era 81

Internal Politics	81
Economic Policy	84
Foreign Policy	85
Invasion of Czechoslovakia	88
Rise and Fall of Détente	90
Stagnation under Gerontocracy	95

#### 5. Gorbachev Comes to Power 99

Andropov's Rule	99
Chernenko "Interregnum"	103
Gorbachev Takes Control	105
Road to Reform	108

#### 6. The Second Russian Revolution 117

Permanent Crisis	117
Yeltsin Eclipses Gorbachev	118
A Coming Dictatorship?	122
The Coup	128
End of the Soviet Union	133

### II THE COMMONWEALTH TODAY 139

#### 7. The Commonwealth 141

The Commonwealth Structure	142
Geography	152
Culture and Religion	159
The Future of the Commonwealth	164

#### 8. The Economy 167

Establishing the Soviet Economy	167
Attempts at Reform	171
The Yeltsin Transformation	178
CIS Economic Issues	181
Problem Sectors	182
Russia's Future	189

#### 9. Foreign Policy 191

Soviet Foreign Policy	191
Russian Foreign Policy under Yeltsin	195
Relations with Europe	198

The United Nations 202  
The Islamic World 202  
Relations with East Asia 207  
Former Client States in the Developing  
World 210

**10. Relations with the United States 215**

Historic Adversaries 216  
Arms Control 221  
Economic Relations 231  
After the Cold War 235

**III COUNTRY PROFILES 239**

**11. The Baltic States 241**

Estonia 241  
Latvia 243  
Lithuania 246

**12. The Central Asian States 251**

Kazakhstan 251  
Kyrgyzstan 255  
Tajikistan 257

Turkmenistan 259  
Uzbekistan 261

**13. The Transcaucasian States 265**

Armenia 265  
Azerbaijan 267  
Georgia 271

**14. The Western States 275**

Belarus 275  
Moldova 279  
Russia 281  
Ukraine 289

**APPENDIX 295**

Biographies 297  
Chronology 313  
Bibliography 325

**Index 329**



## MAPS, BOXES, TABLES, AND FIGURES

---

### MAPS

World War II Eastern Front 55  
Eastern Europe, 1956 67  
North and South Ossetia 154  
Trans-Dniester Moldova 155  
Nagorno-Karabakh 156  
Oil and Gas Pipeline Network 186  
The Baltic States 244  
The Central Asian States 254  
The Transcaucasian States 268  
The Western States 278

### BOXES

The Development of Serfdom 20  
Stolypin: Tsarist Minister 29  
Rasputin: Rakish Adviser 30  
The Philosophy of Karl Marx: Foundation of a  
Revolution 34

Kronstadt Rebellion 40  
Lenin's "Testament" 44  
Secret Police under Stalin: Feared Tool of  
Repression 50  
Nazi Invasion Plan 53  
Western Schools of Thought on Khrushchev's Power  
Structure 68  
The Nixon-Khrushchev "Kitchen Debate" 73  
Brezhnev Politburo 96  
Five Leaders on a Train 106  
The Birth of a Labor Movement 126  
A Botched Coup 131  
The Cold War, McCarthy, and the "Red Scare" Pervade  
the Fabric of American Life 218

### TABLES AND FIGURES

The Romanov Dynasty 24  
Ethnic Russians as a Percentage of Capital City  
Populations 157





## INTRODUCTION

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On December 25, 1991, Soviet president Mikhail S. Gorbachev resigned, bringing an end to the Soviet Union. Minutes after Gorbachev's televised announcement, the red Soviet flag with its hammer and sickle was replaced on the Kremlin flagpole by the Russian tricolored flag. The huge Eurasian nation, which was the wellspring of the international communist movement and the Western world's main adversary, ceased to exist. It was replaced by fifteen nations that had been union republics under the Soviet system.

Eleven of these new countries agreed to form an entity that came to be known as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). But it was soon clear that the CIS was not to be a smaller version of the Soviet Union or even an effective confederation. The CIS merely provided a forum for coordinating some policies and resolving some disputes. The fifteen nations of the former Soviet Union moved toward establishing their own national governments and identities.

The largest of the new states was Russia, which had dominated the Soviet Union politically, economically, and culturally. In Russia, the first among equals in the CIS, a new leadership under popularly elected president Boris N. Yeltsin advanced a reform program based on the free market and democracy. The Communist party had been banned and the dismantling of the central economic apparatus was well under way. After seventy-four years of building communism, Russia had completely abandoned its official ideology and its government embraced what appeared to be very Western economic and political institutions.

## Fall of the Soviet Union

In 1985 when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, a prediction that internal forces would cause the demise of the Soviet Union in less than seven years would have been dismissed as unlikely at best and ridiculous at worst. Although the Soviet Union was suffering from numerous economic maladies and scholars long had acknowledged the explosive potential of nationalism among the USSR's 169 ethnic groups, the country also was a model of stability and central government control.

The Communist party and its bureaucracy dominated virtually every facet of Soviet life. The Committee for State Security (KGB) and other security organs were pervasive in society and had successfully squelched most dissent. The command economy was inefficient, wasteful, and overcentralized, but it appeared to be limping along at a pace sufficient to produce jobs and the basic necessities of life for the Soviet people. The Soviet economy in 1985 was not close to collapse. In international affairs, the Soviet Union had established a reputation as a superpower. Its international ambitions were backed up by a huge nuclear arsenal and conventional military force. Despite its troubles, the Soviet system appeared solid and secure.

The Soviet leadership, however, had recognized the need for reforms. Gorbachev had come to power in part because he represented a more energetic younger generation willing to seek innovative solutions to the nagging problems plaguing Soviet society. More than any other factor, the declining state

of the economy was the catalyst for reform. Economic growth had declined sharply during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the USSR suffered from chronic agricultural production shortfalls, a lack of technological sophistication in most industries, unacknowledged inflation, growing environmental problems, and labor shortages in regions where most industry was located. Only in military production could the Soviet Union compete with the West, but high rates of defense spending weakened the general state of the economy by siphoning off investment from other areas.

### *Gorbachev's Reforms*

Mikhail Gorbachev took power in 1985 unwilling to accept economic stagnation. Yet despite his pronouncements advocating a major economic reconstruction, Gorbachev's initial strategy was cautious and seemed to reflect the need to consolidate his political power. He tried to improve economic performance by enforcing greater labor discipline, giving factory managers more autonomy, and introducing more sophisticated technology into the workplace.

Along with his mild economic reforms, Gorbachev launched his policy of *glasnost* (openness). *Glasnost* had many elements, including more open and honest news coverage by the Soviet media and greater freedom of expression and speech for Soviet artists and common citizens. The policy was designed to put pressure on conservative bureaucrats to accept economic change by allowing the Soviet people and press to criticize abuses of power and unimaginative or timid leadership. It also was intended to facilitate a wider dissemination of information throughout the Soviet Union and overcome the severe social malaise that afflicted the USSR by giving the Soviet people a bigger say in how the country was managed. Gorbachev apparently believed that his economic reforms could not succeed without *glasnost*.

But the policy contained inherent risks. Once Soviet citizens felt free to chastise corrupt regional officials and party bureaucrats in the central government, criticisms of the Communist party

and the Soviet leadership could not be far behind. Moreover, moves to make society more open and less repressive risked encouraging dissidents and igniting the ambitions of various ethnic groups. Dynamic nationalism in the non-Russian republics was not a force the Kremlin wanted to unleash, given the large number of nationalities, their varying demands, and the costs and risks of putting down domestic protests by force.

Considering these possibilities, Gorbachev's approach was risky. He could have continued to try to improve the Soviet economy at the margins as previous Soviet leaders had done and as he had tried to do during his first year in power. Even if conservative bureaucrats remained capable of blocking serious economic restructuring, he had reason to hope that additional limited reforms—such as cutting Soviet defense spending and foreign aid in conjunction with a *détente* with the West, opening up the Soviet Union to more foreign investment, and significantly increasing the size of private farming plots—would provide a boost without jeopardizing the central role of the Communist party or the stability of the country.

### *Failure of Reforms*

Beginning in 1987 Gorbachev and his increasingly radical economic advisers responded to the economy's failure to improve by accelerating *glasnost*, introducing democratic elections, and launching farther-reaching economic reforms. The Soviet leadership sanctioned limited private enterprise activities, sought greater Soviet involvement in the international economy, and demanded that enterprises and farms become self-financing. Yet these moves were criticized by many experts in the West and liberals in Russia as too cautious to bring real change to the Soviet economy.

Gorbachev's plan was accompanied by a continuing economic decline that made the Soviet people increasingly restless. Their patience with steps that were seen as threatening their traditional state-provided economic security diminished as their standard of living dropped, lines at stores

grew, and consumer items became increasingly scarce.

By 1990 the experiment with communism begun in Russia in 1917 appeared to have failed. The Soviet economy was in shambles, and Marxist-Leninist ideology—the basis of Soviet politics, economics, and historical interpretation—had been abandoned by all but a few die-hard conservatives. Responding to angry accusations from conservative party members at the Twenty-eighth Party Congress in June 1990, Aleksandr Yakovlev, a close Gorbachev adviser, said: “A decision of this congress . . . cannot change the fact that the volume of labor production in South Korea is ten times that of the North, nor the fact that people in West Germany live far better than people in the East.” The Communist party had come to be seen as a cynical anachronism whose actions mainly benefited its elite few, not the Soviet people. Even V. I. Lenin, the revered founder of the Soviet state, was not immune to criticism by Soviet journalists and historians. Gorbachev and his reformist colleagues had hoped to orchestrate a gradual reform of Soviet society from the top, but change had developed its own uncertain momentum that the government could not stop.

### *Ethnic Unrest*

As the Soviet economy collapsed, a parallel collapse of Soviet central authority over its internal empire was taking place. During Soviet rule, the Kremlin leadership advanced the myth that the USSR’s myriad nationalities were bonded by communism into a fraternal confederation. The union was imposed on most non-Russian minorities by the Soviet Red Army, just as the tsars had used force to attach neighboring nations in Europe and Asia to the Russian empire. Gorbachev’s liberalizations had inadvertently opened the way for ethnic groups to pursue their dormant aspirations. Nationalist movements in republics on the Soviet periphery agitated for greater sovereignty or outright independence from Moscow.

Meanwhile, the loosening of coercive controls brought to the surface ethnic rivalries and tensions

that had been suppressed under a uniform adherence to Marxism-Leninism. In 1990 Moscow was forced to interpose troops between Armenians and Azeris in the Transcaucasian region. Violence on a smaller scale erupted in Central Asia, the Baltics, and within the non-Russian areas of the Russian Federation itself. In March of that year Lithuania officially declared itself independent of Moscow, setting off a crisis that would last for a year and a half. Gorbachev tried to hold Lithuania and the Baltic states within the union, fearing that a successful secession would encourage an avalanche of demands from independence movements in other republics.

Gorbachev hung his hopes for saving the Soviet Union on a union treaty. This treaty would have redefined the relationship between the republics and the central government, allowing the local governments to exercise autonomy over most affairs while Moscow would play a coordinating role and carry out military and foreign policies.

By the time the treaty was ready to be signed in August 1991, the Soviet Union was in disarray. Gorbachev long had been beset by critics from the left and the right. Liberals saw him as too timid on reform and too willing to continue using repressive measures to hold the country together. Conservatives saw him as someone who was willing to destroy the cherished foundations of Soviet communism. Most Soviet citizens saw him as a leader who had opened up society but failed to deliver on his promises, especially in the economic sphere. The economy was mired in a depression; republic governments, including Yeltsin’s Russian government, were openly ignoring the decisions of the central government; ethnic unrest was growing unabated; independence movements in the republics were increasing in strength; and rumors of a coup by conservative Communist party leaders or the military were commonplace.

### *The Coup*

A day before the union treaty was to be signed, on August 19, 1991, conservative party leaders tried to overthrow the Gorbachev government. Gorba-

chev was detained at his country home in the Crimea and some military units were mobilized in support of the coup. The plotters announced over the national media that Gorbachev was ill and that they had formed the "State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR" through which they would govern the country.

Although the coup had many of the trappings of past Communist power plays, it was carried out with little nerve or skill. Boris Yeltsin vigorously rallied the people of Moscow behind his efforts at resistance. As the democratically elected president of the Russian Federation, he quickly became the focal point for popular opposition to the coup. Yeltsin denounced the putsch as a crude and illegitimate attempt by hardliners to undermine democracy and the rule of law in the Soviet Union. Although he had many well-publicized disagreements with Gorbachev, Yeltsin demanded the Soviet president be restored to power.

Tens of thousands of Russians formed a human barrier around the Moscow "White House," the home of the Russian Federation's government and Yeltsin's stronghold. Key Soviet military units and leaders defected to Yeltsin's side. The coup leaders, having failed to move decisively in the hours immediately after seizing the government, backed down in the face of populist opposition. They declined to order an assault on the White House that would have been bloody and was uncertain of success. On August 21 the coup plotters, realizing their position was untenable, tried to save themselves by proposing a deal with Gorbachev, but the Soviet leader angrily refused.

With the collapse of the coup, Yeltsin was revered as a hero. He and his democratic and reform-minded supporters assumed a dominant role in Soviet politics. Yeltsin placed many of the functions of the former Soviet Union under the control of the Russian republic. Gorbachev returned to his position as president of the USSR, but power had clearly been transferred to the republic governments, most of which declared their independence soon after the failed coup. Gorbachev was weakened by the fact that he had appointed many of the plotters to office.

## *End of an Era*

During the four months between the coup and his resignation Gorbachev struggled without success to put the union treaty back on track. Yeltsin, meanwhile, asserted the authority of Russia, while exploring possibilities for creating some type of cooperative arrangement among the other republics.

On December 1, 1991, the people of Ukraine, the Soviet Union's second most populous and important republic, voted overwhelmingly to endorse independence. The vote removed any hope that the Soviet Union could be salvaged. On December 8 Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus proclaimed the Commonwealth of Independent States. Eight other republics joined the CIS on December 21. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Georgia declined (in the fall of 1992 Azerbaijan withdrew).

Although the success or failure of the CIS depends on one's expectations of its potential, the CIS has failed to accomplish the three most ambitious tasks it might have addressed: constructing a coordinated defense policy, solidifying mechanisms through which the tightly linked economies of the former Soviet Union would continue to support one another, and constructing an effective response to ethnic conflicts. Russia's decision in May 1992 to establish its own defense force indicated that a CIS military force had ceased to be a viable alternative. Although the CIS has attempted economic coordination, most of the economic agreements between the republics have been accomplished on a bilateral basis. Currencies and armies have become symbols of national sovereignty for the new nations.

## International Transformation

International relations have been dominated since World War II by the bipolar military balance and ideological competition between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its bloc of Marxist client states. The Soviet Union appeared to most in the West as a blustering, aggressive, imperial colossus that constantly threatened surrounding nations, ignored human rights, and pursued an unceasing military buildup.



During Gorbachev's tenure, Soviet foreign policy was completely realigned according to the principles of "new thinking." This approach aimed at extricating the Soviet Union from costly regional conflicts, cutting foreign aid and defense spending, encouraging foreign trade and investment, concluding major arms agreements, and improving the USSR's international image.

In 1987 the Soviet government made major concessions that led to the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the United States. In 1988 Gorbachev announced that the USSR would unilaterally cut a half-million troops from its armed forces. In 1989 Moscow withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and began working with the United States to end regional conflicts. Most dramatically, however, the Soviet leadership allowed revolutions to take place in Eastern Europe that effectively broke up the Warsaw Pact military alliance and deprived Moscow of its Eastern European empire.

The Soviets recognized that Eastern Europe was not a typical empire. Since the 1970s it had been an economic drain on the Soviet Union. Yet the Soviets felt obliged to continue dominating the region because of its role as a buffer between the Soviet Union and Western Europe.

But in 1988 Gorbachev encouraged Soviet-style economic and political reforms in Eastern Europe, and by 1989 he had made it clear that the Soviet Union no longer would use force to prop up communist governments. After the Soviet guarantee was removed, the East European communists could not resist the demands of their people. With the exception of Nicolae Ceausescu's regime in Romania, the governments of Eastern Europe gave up their power peacefully when massive protests demonstrated that they could not hold on to it.

As the USSR turned inward to focus on its domestic troubles, it de-emphasized the international geopolitical struggle with the West and rejected Marxist-Leninist ideology as a significant factor in foreign policy making. Consequently, nations that had looked to the Soviet Union as a source of economic and military aid were forced to repair relations with neighbors or with the West.

The dramatic foreign policy changes could be

seen in the Soviet response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Previously, almost any nation or group that threatened the interests of the West would receive Soviet support, encouragement, or sympathy. The Soviet Union did not cooperate with the West in combating terrorism and rarely condemned terrorist acts against Western citizens, saying they were regrettable but understandable. Although the West had more to lose than the Soviets from the Iraqi invasion and Moscow was a major Iraqi arms supplier, the Kremlin quickly joined the United States in condemning Baghdad and agreed to impose an arms embargo against the Iraqis.

The breakup of the Soviet Union has reduced even further the possibility of conflict between East and West. Yeltsin has stated his intent to pursue not only cooperation, but also active friendship with the Soviet Union's former enemies. The Soviet army contained 4 million troops in 1990. But under the Yeltsin government's plan, the Russian military would have no more than 1.5 million troops by 1995.

Russia and the other former Soviet states are in great need of financial and technical assistance that the West could provide. Russian foreign policy under Yeltsin has been aimed at building international support for his domestic reforms, reducing or eliminating costly commitments made during the Soviet era, and advancing Russia as a responsible and important member of the international community.

Where once the main objectives of American policy toward the Soviet Union were containment of its expansion and maintenance of the military balance, objectives in the post-Soviet era have become helping democracy and the free market to survive and codifying rapid arms cuts and military reductions through far-reaching agreements.

Yet while the revolution in the Soviet Union has transformed the international situation for the better, it has also opened a new, unpredictable era in world politics. Fears of an instant nuclear holocaust arising out of a superpower confrontation have been replaced by fears of nuclear proliferation and the emergence of a vast area of instability and ethnic conflict that will have implications for the security of Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.