



The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union

By Serhii Plokhy

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On Christmas Day, 1991, President George H. W. Bush addressed the nation to declare an American victory in the Cold War: earlier that day Mikhail Gorbachev had resigned as the first and last Soviet president. The enshrining of that narrative, one in which the end of the Cold War was linked to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the triumph of democratic values over communism, took center stage in American public discourse immediately after Bush's speech and has persisted for decades—with disastrous consequences for American standing in the world.

As prize-winning historian Serhii Plokhy reveals in *The Last Empire*, the collapse of the Soviet Union was anything but the handiwork of the United States. On the contrary, American leaders dreaded the possibility that the Soviet Union—weakened by infighting and economic turmoil—might suddenly crumble, throwing all of Eurasia into chaos. Bush was firmly committed to supporting his ally and personal friend Gorbachev, and remained wary of nationalist or radical leaders such as recently elected Russian President Boris Yeltsin. Fearing what might happen to the large Soviet nuclear arsenal in the event of the union's collapse, Bush stood by Gorbachev as he resisted the growing independence movements in Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus. Plokhy's detailed, authoritative account shows that it was only after the movement for independence of the republics had gained undeniable momentum on the eve of the Ukrainian vote for independence that fall that Bush finally abandoned Gorbachev to his fate.

Drawing on recently declassified documents and original interviews with key participants, Plokhy presents a bold new interpretation of the Soviet Union's final months and argues that the key to the Soviet collapse was the inability of the two largest Soviet republics, Russia and Ukraine, to agree on the continuing existence of a unified state. By attributing the Soviet collapse to the impact of American actions, US policy makers overrated their own capacities in toppling and rebuilding foreign regimes. Not only was the key American role in the demise of the Soviet Union a myth, but this misplaced belief has guided—and haunted—American foreign policy ever since.

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The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union By Serhii Plokhy Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #192010 in Books
- Brand: Plokhy, Serhii
- Published on: 2014-05-13
- Released on: 2014-05-13
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 6.50" w x 1.75" l, 1.70 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 520 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Spectator, UK

“[A] superb work of scholarship, vividly written, that challenges tired old assumptions with fresh material from East and West, as well as revealing interviews with many major players.”

Sunday Times, UK

“[An] incisive account of the five months leading up to the Union's dissolution... His vibrant, fast-paced narrative style captures the story superbly.”

Mail on Sunday, UK

“Our memories of the upheavals of 1989-91 blur into one picture, with the Soviet collapse indistinguishable from the fall of the Berlin Wall, the death of communism and the end of the Cold War. Now along comes Serhii Plokhy...to bring part of that historical blur into focus in a day-by-day account of the Soviet empire's final five months...Plokhy's account of the coup is a riveting thriller...”

Literary Review, UK

“Almost a day-by-day, blow-by-blow account of the actions and reactions of the main figures... Very relevant to today's Ukrainian crisis...The dramatic events of the second half of 1991 are very well recounted.”

Times of London, UK

“Serhii Plokhy's great achievement in this wonderfully well-written account is to show that much of the triumphalist transatlantic view of the Soviet collapse is historiographical manure.”

Pittsburg Tribune-Review

“Especially provocative given current affairs, this book doesn't dismiss U.S. Cold War policy's contributions but contends the USSR fell mainly because of its imperial nature, ethnic mix and political structure, with the inability of Russia and Ukraine, the biggest Soviet republics, to agree on continuing unity as the straw that broke the Soviet camel's back.”

Ukrainian Weekly

“A meticulously documented chronicle of the evil empire's demise.... [Plokhy]is the voice Ukrainians have been yearning for.”

Library Journal, Starred Review

“Plokhy's cleanly written narrative presents a clear view of the complex events and numerous parties involved in the Soviet Union's demise as well as the reasons that the Soviet government could not ultimately rein in Ukrainian and Russian national movements. VERDICT: Plokhy's fine scholarship should be set alongside such great works as David Remnick's *Lenin's Tomb* and Vladislav M. Zubok's *A Failed Empire*. An excellent text for historians, students of current events, and anyone fascinated with political intrigue.”

Publishers Weekly

“One of a rare breed: a well-balanced, unbiased book written on the fall of Soviet Union that emphasizes expert research and analysis.”

Winner of the 2015 *Lionel Gelber Prize*

Winner of the 2015 *Pushkin House Russian Book Prize*

Wall Street Journal

“A stirring account of an extraordinary moment...what elevates *The Last Empire* from solid history to the must-read shelf is its relevance to the current crisis.”

Foreign Affairs

“Using recently released documents, Plokhy traces in fascinating detail the complex events that led to the Soviet Union's implosion...”

Financial Times

“A fine-grained, closely reported, highly readable account of the upheavals of 1991.”

Slate

“Serhii Plokhy's extraordinarily well-timed new book ...makes a convincing case that contrary to the triumphalist American narrative of Cold War victory, or the more recent paranoid Russian narrative of Cold War defeat, the U.S. never anticipated the breakup of the Soviet Union—in fact, the U.S. tried to use what little influence it had over the situation to prevent it...Plokhy makes a convincing case that the misplaced triumphalism of the senior Bush's administration led to the disastrous hubris of his son's.”

***Telegraph*, UK**

“A fascinating and readable deep dive into the final half-year of the Soviet Union.”

About the Author

Serhii Plokhy is the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Professor of Ukrainian History at Harvard University. A three-time recipient of the American Association for Ukrainian Studies prize and author of *Yalta: The Price of Peace*, Plokhy lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kai Martin:

This *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* book is not really ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is usually information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get facts which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. This *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* without we recognize teach the one who examining it become critical in considering and analyzing. Don't become worry *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* can bring if you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even phone. This *The Last Empire: The Final Days of the Soviet Union* having excellent arrangement in word and also layout, so you will not sense uninterested in reading.

Stephanie Armstrong:

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