

# Mission Critical: Harvard's Regional Centers

as illustrated by the Davis Center for Russian & Eurasian Studies

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# WHAT KILLED THE U.S.S.R.?

## EXPLAINING THE COLLAPSE

To really grasp what drives Russia today, why Putin intervened in Ukraine, and how the U.S.-Russia relationship grew so strained, we need to know why the Soviet Union collapsed.

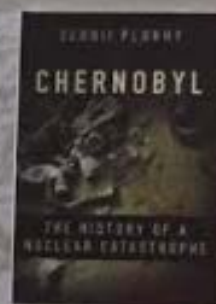
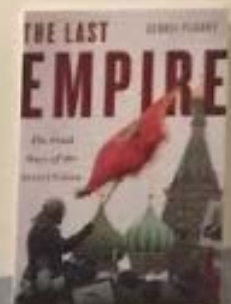
It's not that Gorbachev failed to grasp the risks in weakening the Communist Party's monopoly on information—though this was a contributing factor. And it's not that Ronald Reagan drove the U.S.S.R. into bankruptcy—though Reagan's willingness to engage the "evil empire" in an arms race didn't help the fragile Soviet economy.

Reviewing the 1980s from Moscow, Washington, Kyiv, Almaty, and other Soviet

capitals through recently declassified documents and interviews, Serhii Plokhii finds that growing tension between Ukraine and Russia, not American machinations, hastened the Soviet Union's demise. Moreover, Plokhii fingers the 1986 reactor explosion at Ukraine's Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant as the trigger for a powerful social awakening. Anti-nuclear eco-nationalism mobilized popular fronts in Lithuania, Ukraine, and other Soviet republics, which together helped topple the Soviet regime.



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