

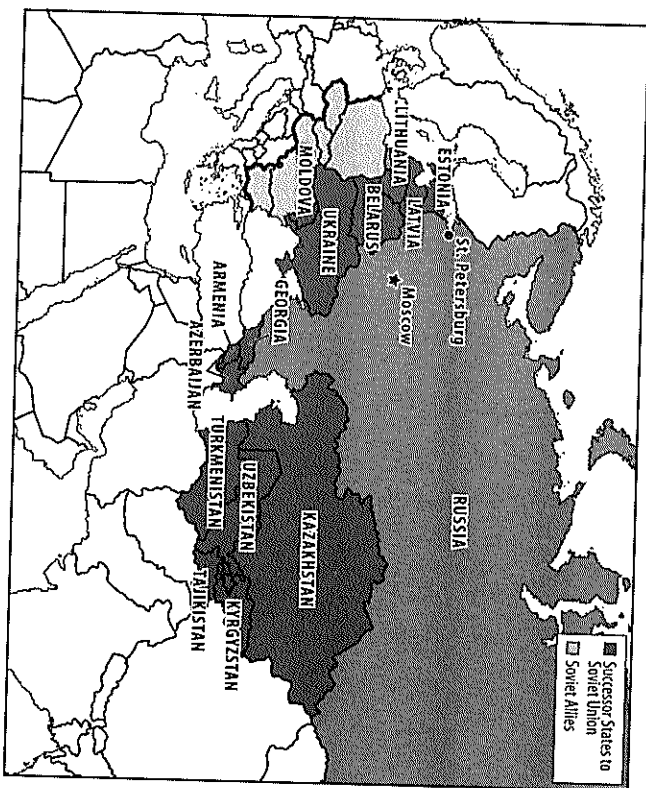
EURASIA

For most of the second half of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union controlled Eurasia—from central Germany to the Pacific, as far south as the Caucasus and the Hindu Kush. When the Soviet Union collapsed, its western frontier moved east nearly a thousand miles, from the West German border to the Russian border with Belarus. From the Hindu Kush its border moved northward a thousand miles to the Russian border with Kazakhstan. Russia was pushed from the border of Turkey northward to the northern Caucasus, where it is still struggling to keep its foothold in the region. Russian power has now retreated farther east than it has been in centuries. During the Cold War it had moved farther west than ever before. In the coming decades, Russian power will settle somewhere between those two lines.

After the Soviet Union dissolved at the end of the twentieth century, foreign powers moved in to take advantage of Russia's economy, creating an era of chaos and poverty. They also moved rapidly to integrate as much as they could of the Russian empire into their own spheres of influence. Eastern Europe was absorbed into NATO and the EU, and the Baltic states were also absorbed into NATO. The United States entered into a close relationship with both Georgia in the Caucasus and with many of the Central Asian "stans," particularly after September 11, when the Russians allowed U.S. forces into the area to wage the war in Afghanistan. Most significantly, Ukraine moved into an alignment with the United States and away from Russia—this was a breaking point in Russian history.

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine, from December 2004 to January 2005, was the moment when the post-Cold War world genuinely ended for Russia. The Russians saw the events in Ukraine as an attempt by the United States to draw Ukraine into NATO and thereby set the stage for Russian disintegration. Quite frankly, there was some truth to the Russian perception.

If the West had succeeded in dominating Ukraine, Russia would have become indefensible. The southern border with Belarus, as well as the southwestern frontier of Russia, would have been wide open. In addition, the distance between Ukraine and western Kazakhstan is only about four hundred miles, and that is the gap through which Russia has been able to project power toward the Caucasus (see map, page 71). We should assume,



Successor States to the Soviet Union

then, that under these circumstances Russia would have lost its ability to control the Caucasus and would have had to retreat farther north from Chechnya. The Russians would have been abandoning parts of the Russian Federation itself, and Russia's own southern flank would become highly vulnerable. Russia would have continued to fragment until it returned to its medieval frontiers.

Had Russia fragmented to this extent, it would have created chaos in Eurasia—to which the United States would not have objected, since the U.S. grand strategy has always aimed for the fragmentation of Eurasia as the first line of defense for U.S. control of the seas, as we have seen. So the United States had every reason to encourage this process; Russia had every reason to block it.

After what Russia regarded as an American attempt to further damage it, Moscow reverted to a strategy of reasserting its sphere of influence in the areas of the former Soviet Union. The great retreat of Russian power ended in