

The Fall of the Soviet Union

Objectives

- Understand the key events and people that contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union.
- Trace the impact of the fall of the Soviet Union on other nations.

Build Background Knowledge L3

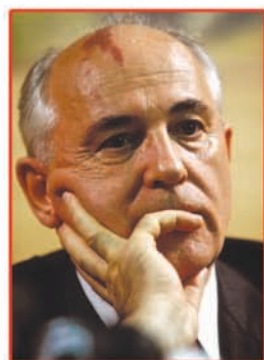
Ask students to recall what they learned about the economic progress of the Soviet Union after World War II. Ask **How might Soviet citizens and leaders feel after many years of economic stagnation?** (*They would probably feel frustrated and perhaps ready for a change.*) Based on their previous reading, ask students to predict likely factors that led to the fall of the Soviet Union.

Instruct L3

- Walk students through the photos and captions. Ask **Who were some of the key players in the collapse of the Soviet Union?** (*Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin*) Ask students to create a timeline of the events leading to the fall of the Soviet Union and to use the 1991 and 1992 maps to explain the changes that occurred after the breakup. Then ask **What might it have been like to live in the Soviet Union during this time of transition?** (*It was probably exciting, but also scary and unsettling.*)

THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION

Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev was due to sign a treaty that would reduce the power of the Soviet government. On August 18, 1991, two days before the signing, a committee of Communist hardliners detained Gorbachev at his summer home. The next day, the committee announced to the nation that Gorbachev had resigned and that they were taking control of the government. The committee sent columns of tanks and troops to take control of the capital, Moscow. (See photo at the right.) However, Boris Yeltsin, the president of Russia, the largest Soviet republic, defied the hardliners. Yeltsin called on thousands of Russians to resist the unlawful takeover. Finally, on August 21, the hardliners gave up their takeover and ordered Soviet troops to retreat from Moscow. Yeltsin's defeat of the hardliners led a few months later to the breakup of the Soviet Union.



◀ Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev



History Background

Fall of the Soviet Union The only domino effect communism truly saw was during its decline in Europe in 1989, when nation after nation rejected their ruling regimes and forged freer governments. During that summer, Poland held elections and voted out the communist party. Hungary quickly followed. Then East Germans

began clamoring for the right to go to West Germany. Soon the Berlin Wall fell and spurred the peaceful communist overthrow in Czechoslovakia and the violent one in Romania, not to mention the dissolution of communism in Albania and Bulgaria. All told, eight countries abandoned communism within six months.

Independent Practice

History Interactive To enrich and extend the lesson, have students access this unit's History Interactive map, audio, and slide show at **Web Code nap-3041**.

Monitor Progress

To confirm students' understanding, have them focus on the visuals. Ask them to explain the significance of each image.



▲ Russian president Boris Yeltsin, holding a sheet of paper at left, stands atop a Soviet tank on August 19, 1991, and calls on Russians to resist the attempted takeover of the Soviet Union by hardliners. Behind him, a supporter holds a Russian flag. Yeltsin's success in defying the takeover broke the power of the central Soviet government and led to the independence of Russia and the other Soviet republics.

◀ Stanislav Shushkevich (left), president of Belarus; Boris Yeltsin (center), president of Russia; and Leonid Kravchuk (right), president of Ukraine, agreed on December 8, 1991, to dissolve the Soviet Union, effective at the end of 1991.



Thinking Critically

- Analyze Images** Why is it significant that Russian President Yeltsin is standing on top of a Soviet tank in the photo at the top of the page?
- Synthesize Information** How did the events of August 1991 cause the Soviet government to lose power to Russia?
- Map Skills** Based on the maps, why would Russia's wish for independence lead to the Soviet Union's breakup?



Differentiated Instruction

Solutions for All Learners

L4 Gifted and Talented L4 Advanced Readers

In 1984, Jaroslav Seifert, a Czech poet, won the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature. He wrote the following about Eastern Europe: "For us, there is no Eastern Europe. It is a collection of countries. . . . You should not see us as a

single country." Write this statement on the board and discuss the meaning of it with students. Ask students how the events in 1989 reflect this attitude.

Thinking Critically

- It shows that the Soviet Union, as represented by its army, had lost power to Soviet republics such as Russia, as represented by its president, Yeltsin.
- Popular support for Yeltsin showed that Soviet central power had lost support among Russians and other Soviet citizens.
- Russia is by far the largest and most influential of the former Soviet republics. Other republics would follow Russia's lead.