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# Foreword

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Among the most disturbing revelations resulting from glasnost are widespread reports of environmental damage inflicted throughout the former Soviet Union during 70 years of communist rule. Although the reports have often been sketchy and sensationalized, what emerges is a portrait of a Soviet regime willing to sacrifice the well-being of the environment and the health of the citizenry in its quest for military and economic might.

The nuclear calamity epitomized by Chernobyl helped drag the system down. This and other environmental assaults on ancestral homelands not only fueled the fires of activism but also spurred an ethnic revival that ultimately contributed to the Soviet collapse. Now that the USSR is gone, the newly independent successor states must deal with a legacy of destruction; and as they pursue their economic goals, one wonders whether the region may not be poised for a second onslaught on nature.

In this book, DJ Peterson draws upon his travels to the capitals and provinces of the affected regions, where he interviewed officials of both the new and old governments and was given access to data heretofore unavailable. He vividly describes the overwhelming environmental problems facing the successor states: air and water pollution, degradation of land resources, and inadequate management of solid and hazardous wastes. He records and analyzes the responses of governmental actors, industry, the military, and grass-roots environmental organizations in those regions. Finally, he reflects on the roles and responsibilities of the advanced industrialized nations in mitigating problems with potentially widespread international ramifications.

*Troubled Lands* gives readers a wide-angle lens through which to view the struggles of newly reconstituted countries working in parallel to

fundamentally redirect social and political institutions and to build stable market economies that incorporate responsible environmental policies. Beyond that, these chapters also function as case studies with important lessons for other nations around the world—the United States among them—that aspire to achieve the delicate balance between economic prosperity and environmental responsibility.

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