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This 2002 study examines the process by which the seemingly impossible in 1987 - the disintegration of the Soviet state - became the seemingly inevitable by 1991, providing an original interpretation not only of the Soviet collapse, but also of the phenomenon of nationalism more generally. Probing the role of nationalist action as both cause and effect, Beissinger utilizes data and case studies from across the USSR during its final years to elicit the shifting relationship between pre-existing structural conditions, institutional constraints, and event-generated influences in the nationalist explosions that brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Beissinger demonstrates, the 'tidal' context of nationalism - i.e., the transnational influence of one nationalism upon another - is critical to an explanation of the success and failure of particular nationalisms, why some nationalisms turn violent, and how a crescendo of events can overwhelm states, periodically evoking large-scale structural change in the character of the state system.
