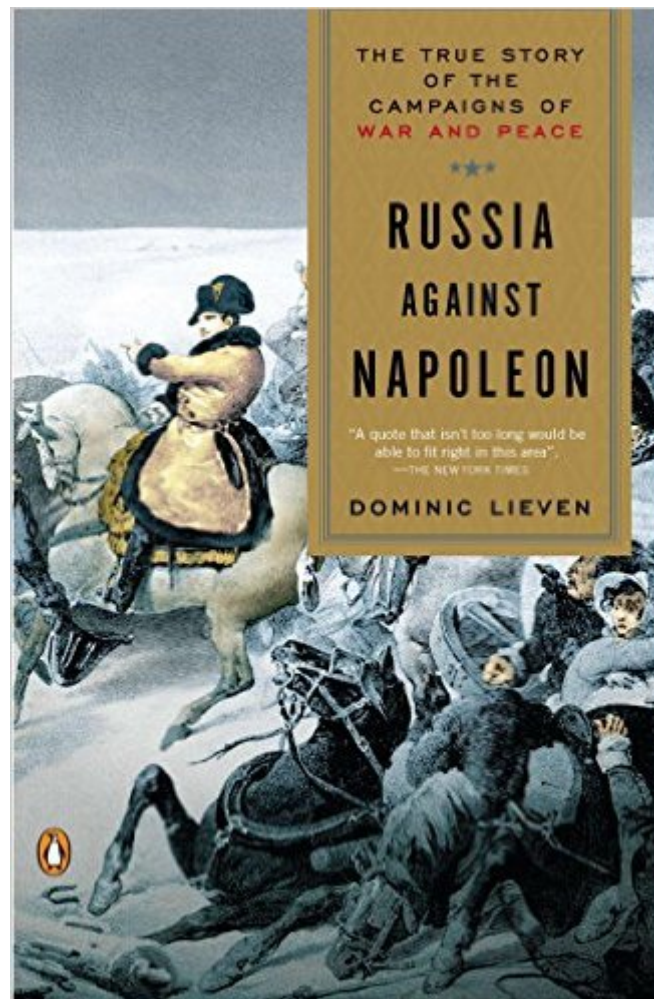


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Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story Of The Campaigns Of War And Peace



Synopsis

The first history of the epic defeat of Napoleon's empire told from the Russian perspective. Though much has been written about Napoleon's doomed invasion of Russia and the collapse of the French Empire that ensued, virtually all of it has been from the Western perspective. Now, taking advantage of never-before-seen documents from the Russian archives, Dominic Lieven upends much of the conventional wisdom about the events that formed the backdrop of Tolstoy's masterpiece, War and Peace. Lieven's riveting narrative sweeps readers through epic battles, tense diplomatic exchanges on which the fate of nations hung, and the rise of Russia from near-ruin to Europe's liberator. Rich in detail, Russia Against Napoleon is a groundbreaking masterwork.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This very good book is a successful revision of the history of the Napoleonic campaign against Russia in 1812 and the ensuing campaigns that led to Napoleon's expulsion from the throne of France. An expert on the Russian empire, Lieven's reinterpretation is based on what appears to be considerable research in Russian archives and extensive analysis of Russian secondary literature not used in most prior English language books. In contrast to most prior accounts that focus on Napoleon and tend to view the Russians as relatively passive reactors to French actions, Lieven emphasizes the actions and foresight of the Russian leaders, particularly the emperor Alexander I. Lieven argues well that the 1812 French invasion was the result of deliberate Russian decisions to pursue a war that would eventually allow formation of a Prussian-Austrian-Russian alliance against Napoleonic France and that the Russians anticipated and sought a war of attrition

on their own soil. Lieven is particularly good on the complex role of Russian internal politics, the limits on Alexander's freedom of action, and the considerable limitations of the relatively primitive Russian state. In many ways, the best parts of the book are the accounts of how Alexander and his advisers pursued military reform and the administrative apparatus to logistically support the huge effort required by the decision to pursue war with the French. The descriptions of the remarkable efforts undertaken by the Russian state to defend Russia and then to support a large army that moves across much of Europe provide an outstanding look at the power and limitations of European states in this period.

In this new study about one of the best-known and much-studied periods of history, Dominic Lieven has finally offered us a beautifully-crafted history written from the Russian point of view. It looks like he has combed every possible Russian archive and the result is mesmerizing. In 1812 Napoleon's army proudly marched and invaded Russia, but only less than two years later, the Russian army was marching into Paris. As the author points out from the very beginning, the personal history of Napoleon during these years, 1812-1814, is a "tale of hubris and nemesis". The story contains two of the major battles in European history, Leipzig and Borodino. If at first Napoleon's first army was smashed in the battlefield of Russia, his second was defeated on the battlefields of Germany. To quote, "In the longest campaign in European history, the Russian army pursued the French all the way from Moscow to Paris and led the victorious coalition into the enemy capital on March 21, 1814". Prof. Lieven adds that he is an old-fashioned historian who has always wanted to tell this story and came to the conclusion that the "story as told in Western Europe and North America was very far from the truth". Thus he set out to correct things and decided that the best way to do it was to write about this era from the Russian perspective. We are also told that three of his direct ancestors were generals in the Battle of Leipzig! The Napoleonic wars occurred at the dawn of modern nationalism and the result is a national bias in the writing of history which exists in all countries especially when it comes to writing about war. One area of Napoleonic warfare which has attracted too little attention from historians of every nationality is that of logistics, namely the equipment and feeding of armies.

The writer suggests that Russians have downplayed their role in the fall of Napoleon. The general idea alive in the popular mind is that Napoleon invaded Russia with a huge army consisting of troops from most of Europe. The Russians retreated deep into their own territory and fought a drawish battle at Borodino. The failure of the Russians to capitulate meant that Napoleon had to

retreat losing most of his vast army from typhus. With Napoleon losing his army Europe was liberated. The suggestion of what actually happened is somewhat different. Alexander the ruler of Russia decided not only to defy Napoleon but he decided to defeat him. This meant following up his defense of Russia with a rapid advance into Europe. Alexander was able to convince Napoleon's allies Prussia and Austria to change sides. A coalition army was then able to defeat Napoleon in Germany and to then invade France setting up a balance of power that was to last for 50 or so years. To achieve victory he had to continually mobilize troops and supply his army which was a huge distance from its own territory. One of the strengths of France was its ability to use conscription to raise mass armies. Alexander had to keep up the tempo of his advance even fighting through the winter to keep the French off balance. The theme of the book is that Russia's achievement was considerable. Although it was a backward country which still retained serfdom it was militarily strong. Of course Russia and Britain were two of the most successful imperial powers. Britain the richest country at the time relied on what could be seen as their high tech navy to establish a world empire. The Russians had a low tech army but were able to expand eastwards against weaker opponents.

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