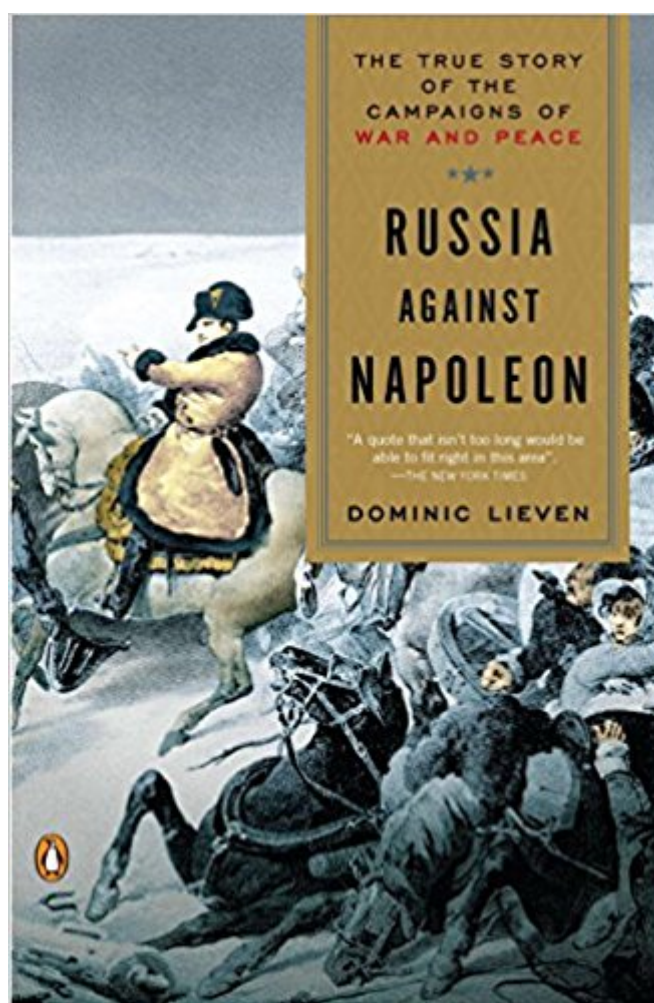


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Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story Of The Campaigns Of War And Peace



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.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Lieven, professor of history at the London School of Economics, uses Russian archives as the basis for this seminal reinterpretation of Napoleon's defeat in 1812-1814. Russia's leaders cleverly engaged Napoleon in a kind of drawn-out campaign the French system was least able to wage. Russia's armies outfought Napoleon's, thanks in good part to the courage, endurance, and loyalty of soldiers led by officers whose central virtues were honor and courage. Russian staffs and administrators kept the troops supplied despite the long and increasing distances between bases and theaters of operations. And coordinating the effort was Tsar Alexander II, whose courage, skill, and intelligence held together the final alliance against Napoleon all the way from Moscow to Paris. Lieven weaves these threads together with flair and offers insight into the specifics of everything from infantry tactics to diplomatic negotiations. He concludes that

Russian and European security were mutually dependent, and that Russia's war was seen by Europeans as one of liberation from Napoleon's exactions and ambitions. While debatable, neither point can be dismissed. Illus., maps. (Apr. 19) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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This is the best history of Russia's part in the Napoleonic Wars that I've read thus far. Unlike some of the other books on the topic, which cover only the 1812 campaign, this volume covers all of Russia's wars with Napoleon from 1805 to 1814. The author does a really good job of describing the strengths and flaws of many of the main characters--Alexander, Kutuzov, de Tolly, and many others. He also does an admirable job of bringing to light many of the usually nameless Russian bureaucrats and soldiers that helped ensure victory by organizing replacements, fodder, uniforms, etc. The challenges that some of these logisticians faced must have been staggering, and yet they succeeded. The author also does a great job of breathing life into many of the significant players in the drama, such as Toll, von Diebitsch, Arakcheev, Ermolov, etc. The battle descriptions are good, but generally a bit brief and greatly hindered by the lack of adequate maps. While there are a handful of campaign maps clumped at the beginning of the book, there are only one or two battle maps (IIRC Borodino and Leipzig), and even these show only the localities, and not troop locations or movements. Generally, I would subtract at least half a star from this book for the poor maps. Finally, the author does a decent job of describing some diplomatic aspects of the wars, especially Alexander's views towards Napoleon, although the diplomatic coverage is not what I'd call comprehensive. Overall, a highly recommended book for anyone interested in Russia in the Napoleonic era, but I'd recommend bringing your own military atlas for a better understanding of how the campaigns and battles unfolded.

Napoleon is a divisive figure. Adulated in France, despised by the English: besides leaving parts of Europe in ruins by incessant wars and so many killed including the French male population, he left a lasting legacy not the least the Napoleonic code of laws still largely used. This book shows in great details how Alexander, tsar of Russia, not only defeated Napoleon on Russian soil, but gathered a coalition of allies to lead a remarkable strategy to crush Napoleon's Grande Armée in France. The author recounts in details the battles and tells the stories of the great and not so great men in the

coalition, especially from a Russian point of view. Napoleon was a genius but nonetheless had to be stopped, and the brave men of Great Russia led by an unassuming monarch, brought peace to the continent. I am Canadian by birth, French and have lived in Russia. My vision of the Napoleonic wars has been tainted by the hatred of the English, the adoration of the French for Napoleon and of course "War and Peace". This book presents a less sentimental, and probably more accurate point of view. It also highlights the great role Russia played for the good of Europe, and hopefully will do so again if the country joins back its natural place in the continent.

As a history buff whose favorite novel is War and Peace, I found this scholarly study, based primarily on recently opened Russian archives, fascinating and enlightening. As the author states several times, our view of the 1812 campaign is heavily influenced by Tolstoy's view of history as a clash of impersonal forces. In fact, as Lieven demonstrates, the Russian conduct of the 1812 campaign was part of a carefully thought out strategy, based on previous experience with Napoleon by Alexander I and Marshall Barclay de Tolly (the leading Russian general at the outset of the campaign, not Kutuzov, who arrived late on the scene). The success of this strategy and the often neglected campaigns of 1813 and 1814 brought about Napoleon's downfall, not the Russian winter. The author's detailed descriptions of the 1813-1814 campaigns also help explain the subsequent Vienna settlement. The Congress of Vienna is often described as if the map of Europe were redrawn on a blank sheet of paper. In fact, as Lieven shows, the territorial settlement in Poland, Norway and Germany very much reflected the military situation at the end of the conflict, which resulted from the strategy of Alexander, Barclay and their Prussian, Swedish, and Austrian allies. The book is very well written and carefully indicates sources without letting the scholarly citations get in the way of the narrative.

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