



Russia Against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814

Dominic Lieven

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Tho much has been written about Napoleon's doomed invasion of Russia & 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, Lieven upends much of the conventional wisdom about the events that formed the backdrop of Tolstoy's masterpiece, War & Peace. Lieven's riveting narrative sweeps readers thru epic battles, tense diplomatic exchanges on which the fate of nations hung & the rise of Russia from near-ruin to Europe's liberator. Rich in detail, Russia Against Napoleon is a groundbreaking masterwork.

Russia Against Napoleon: The Battle for Europe, 1807 to 1814 Details

Date : Published October 2009 by Allen Lane (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9780713996371

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Format : Hardcover 672 pages

Genre : History, War, Nonfiction, Cultural, France, European History, Russia, Russian History



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Sotiris Karaiskos says

A book that contains a great amount of information about the great conflict between Napoleon's army and the Russians, and at the same time refutes many historical myths. I particularly like the fact that is exploring all aspects of history, from the leaders' agreements, to the efforts to feed the army. Despite its complexity, however, it is a very fascinating reading that has the ability to put you at the heart of the events.

?να βιβλ?ο που περι?χει π?ρα πολλ?ς πληροφορ?ες για τη μεγ?λη σ?γκρουση του στρατο? του Ναπολ?οντα με τους Ρ?σους και παρ?λληλα διαψε?δει πολλο?ς ιστορικο?ς μ?θους. Μου αρ?σει ιδια?τερα το γεγον?ς ?τι ερευν? ?λες τις πτυχ?ς της ιστορ?ας, απ? τις συμφων?ες των ηγετ?v, μ?χρι τις προσπ?θειες για τη σ?τιση του στρατο?. Παρ? την πολυπλοκ?τητα του, ?μως, και το πλ?θος των πληροφορι?ν ε?ναι ?να ιδια?τερα συναρπαστικ? αν?γνωσμα που ?χει την ικαν?τητα να σε β?ζει στην καρδι? των γεγον?των.

Simon says

Good God. Yes, it is a worthy corrective to the idea that little history of the Napoleonic conflict has been written from the Russian perspective. But the writing is turgid, to put it as kindly as possible, and it tells you far more about what a particular cavalry unit was doing on a particular day than Russian foreign policy on a broader level. I found this almost unreadable, and I read history the way a slot machine takes quarters. To be fair, it might be of interest to military historians. To be exact, Russian military historians. To be completely exact, Russian military historians whose interest focuses on 1812-1814. If that is you, this is your book.

Jim says

I gave this book five stars not because it is beautifully written, but because **Russia Against Napoleon** delivers not only more than its subtitle promises, but manages to upset much of the apple cart of Napoleonic history. Everyone knows the **War and Peace** story of Mikhail Kutuzov's courageous "escort" of the Napoleonic invading force to the borders of Central Europe.

But what happened next? That's where history commonly ignores the fact that the Russians continued their advance after Kutuzov's death -- continued it, in fact, into the heart of France, where they, with the help of Prussia and Austria, forced Napoleon to surrender. Lieven writes:

At one level it is absurd to call Leo Tolstoy the main villain in this misunderstanding. A novelist is not a historian. Tolstoy writes about individuals' mentalities, values and experiences during and before 1812. But **War and Peace** has had more influence on popular perceptions of Napoleon's defeat by Russia than all the history books ever written. By denying any rational direction of events in 1812 by human actors and implying that military professionalism was a German disease Tolstoy feeds rather easily into Western interpretations of 1812 which

blame the snow or chance for French defeat. By ending his novel in Vilna in December 1812 he also contributes greatly to the fact that both Russians and foreigners largely forget the huge Russian achievement in 1813-14 even getting their army across Europe into Paris, let alone defeating Napoleon en route. One problem with this is that marginalizing or misunderstanding as crucial an actor as Russia results in serious errors in interpreting how and why Napoleon's empire fell. But it is also the case that to understand what happened in 1812 it is crucial to realize that [Czar] Alexander [I] and Barclay de Tolly always planned for a long war, which they expected to begin with a campaign on Russian soil that would exhaust Napoleon but that would end in a Russian advance into Europe and the mobilization of a new coalition of anti-Napoleonic forces.

Under Lieven's interpretation, the hero of the Napoleonic wars was not Wellington, but Alexander I. He planned it, was at the battles, and exerted powerful diplomacy to raise anti-Napoleonic armies from two powers that Napoleon had already defeated: Prussia and Austria. Wellington beat Napoleon once, at Waterloo, but he had never encountered the Corsican in his battles in Spain and Portugal during the Peninsular Campaign.

When one reads **Russia Against Napoleon**, the name of Lieven crops up frequently. General Prince Christoph von Lieven and Lieutenant-General Prince Johann von Lieven were two Baltic German nobles in the Russian military who were ancestors of the Dominic Lieven, Professor of Russian History at the London School of Economics, who wrote this excellent and most deserving history.

Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says

This is an excellent, and eminently readable, political and military history of the latter stages of the Napoleonic Wars from the Russian perspective. Professor Lieven has done a superb job of crafting a suspenseful story involving some truly remarkable characters. His description of the battlefield tactical situations, the strategic implications of the armies moving across Europe in pursuit of Napoleon's *Grande Armee* is some of the best I've read, and rivals Shelby Foote's treatment of the American Civil War.

What really made this book stand out for me was Lieven's extensive and fascinating portrayal of the diplomatic and political machinations that led to the Allies finally coming together under the common goal of utterly destroying Napoleon's ability to wage war in Europe. For far too long too many people have been under the mistaken impression that it was the British, and the British alone, that led to the defeat of Napoleon. While it is true, in one sense, in another sense Napoleon's final defeat could not have occurred without the dogged perseverance of Tsar Alexander and the truly superb Russian Army that he led to ultimate victory on the long road from Moscow to Paris between 1812 and 1814.

I highly recommend this to any interested in 19th Century European history, and especially to those interested in Napoleonic history. This is an indispensable resource, and ever so well written.

Riku Sayuj says

Tolstoy As Villain: Tolstoy, Tolstory, Tall Story

Russia's defeat of Napoleon is one of the most dramatic stories in European history. The war has been immortalized by Tolstoy in his epic, *War & Peace*. There is no great puzzle as to why Russia fought Napoleon. How it fought him and why it won are much bigger and more interesting questions. To answer these questions requires one to demolish well-established myths.

It is not surprising that myths dominate Western thinking about Russia's role in Napoleon's defeat. What happened in 1812–14 is usually distorted in British, French and American books. Popular works on the Napoleonic era necessarily follow a rather set pattern.

Fascination with Napoleon, with the timeless lessons to be learned from military genius, along with the fame of Clausewitz, generally seen as the greatest of all thinkers on modern war, has meant that the Russian side of the story paled in comparison. And got short shrift. The result is that the Russian side of the story is ignored or misinterpreted, with historians largely seeing Russia through the prism of French- or German-language sources.

The European Myths

The distortions manifest first as sort of colonial racism. Napoleon himself set the tone by finding few words of praise for any Russian troops other than Cossacks - ascribing to them the cause of his own retreat. Blaming defeat on the Cossacks or the weather was useful. Since the French army had no Cossacks and the weather was an 'unfair' act of God, no French officer need fear that by invoking these sources of disaster he was questioning his own superior virility or professional skill.

Thus, studies of the 1812 campaign in English mostly concentrate on Napoleon's mistakes, on the problems created for the French by Russia's geography and climate. The year 1813 traditionally belongs to German authors celebrating the resurgence of Prussia and the triumph of German patriotism.

The Russian Distortion

Thus the rest of Europe had a complete version of how events transpired. But, what of Russia itself?

In Russia, the later Decembrist revolt and its suppression was the beginning of the exceptionally bitter split between right and left in Russia which eventually ended in the revolution of 1917. The violent hatred between the two camps helped to poison and distort memories of 1812–14.

When it took over the 1812 myth and made it an integral part of Soviet patriotism, the Communist regime to a great extent set such ideas in stone. The historical reality of Russia's war effort had to be startlingly distorted to suit official ideology in the Stalinist era. Nobles and the Royalty had to be vilified; a folk hero in the form of Kutuzov had to be elevated; and the significance of mass resistance to Napoleon had to be exaggerated.

The Loudest Voice: Tolstoy

Leo Tolstoy was by far the most important nineteenth-century mythmaker as regards his impact on Russian (and foreign) understanding of Russia's role in the Napoleonic era. Tolstoy depicts elemental Russian patriotism as uniting in defense of national soil.

War and Peace has had more influence on popular perceptions of Napoleon's defeat by Russia than all the history books ever written. By denying any rational direction of events in 1812 by human actors and

implying that military professionalism was a German disease Tolstoy feeds rather easily into Western interpretations of 1812 which blame the snow or chance for French defeat.

And, perhaps most important in the context of this work, Tolstoy, by ending his novel *War and Peace* in December 1812 with the war only half over and the greatest challenges still to come, he also contributes greatly to the fact that both Russians and foreigners largely forget the huge Russian achievement in 1813–14 even in getting their army across Europe to Paris, let alone defeating Napoleon en route. Thus, the long, bitter but ultimately triumphant road that led from Vilna in December 1812 to Paris in March 1814 plays no part in his work, just as it was entirely marginalized in the Soviet patriotic canon and in contemporary Russian folk memory.

So instead of being a voice for Russia, this popular or ‘Tolstoyan’ Russian interpretation of the war fits rather well with foreign accounts that play down the role of Russia’s army and government in the victory over Napoleon.

Napoleon himself was much inclined to blame geography, the climate and chance; this absolved him from responsibility for the catastrophe. Historians usually add Napoleon’s miscalculations and blunders to the equation but many of them are happy to go along with Tolstoy’s implied conclusion that the Russian leadership had little control over events and that Russian ‘strategy’ was a combination of improvisation and accident.

Inevitably too, Russian lack of interest in 1813–14 left the field free for historians of other nations who were happy to tell the story of these years with Russia’s role marginalized.

Conclusion

The above is a summation of the basic premise of the book. The author goes on to demonstrate that these ‘stories’ are myths and tries to give a detailed analysis of how Russia really defeated Napoleon. He gives details of every campaign, including logistics, troop recruitment, weather patterns, foreign policy manipulations, chance events, etc. It is fascinating yet quite tedious.

For now, I can provide no comments on the author’s thesis and can only form an opinion after further exploration of the events through other histories. To me, the premise of the book was more interesting and perhaps more important than the actual content itself, which is passably good but never intriguing.

I can comment on whether this really is essential reading or not for explorers of Tolstoy (and students of Russia, by default) only after finishing *War & Peace*, but for now it does seem to be.

Jerome says

A very well-written study of Russia’s war with Napoleon. Lieven’s research is solid and it seems that he has examined almost every primary source on the topic. The book is almost entirely told from the Russian perspective, and he aims to show that defeating Napoleon was not just a matter of cold, mud, and weather. He shows how Napoleon was also defeated by the deliberate actions and foresight of Russian leaders and commanders.

The matter of logistics is one often ignored when it comes to the history of the Napoleonic Wars, but Lieven

provides a good amount of insight into the topic. Russia's ability to keep its armies well-supplied was crucial to its victory. Another was Russia's use of horses; Napoleon had lost almost all of his horses during the invasion; he managed to replace the losses in manpower by 1813, but his lack of effective cavalry forces would hamper his ability to fight in the campaign years that followed.

Most of the book deals with Russian diplomacy, military strategy, and battlefield operations, as well as the mobilization of the Russian home front. Lieven provides lengthy but excellent descriptions of Russia's ministers and generals, as well as the differences between the Russian and French armies. He describes both conventional military operations and Russia's use of guerrilla warfare, and he is careful to distinguish this from the one that took place during the Second World War. Lieven also describes how Tsar Alexander came to the decision to pursue Napoleon and how he, remarkably, persuaded Austria and Prussia to form an unlikely alliance. He also describes the role of internal politics and the limitations of Russia as a state. Russia's attempts at military reform as they struggled against Napoleon are also well-described.

Interestingly, Lieven disputes the idea that the winter played much of a role in the defeat of Napoleon's invasion. The harsh winter of 1812 only began after the Russians smashed Napoleon on the battlefield. The heroism of Russian troops and the quality of their officers is also emphasized by Lieven. Russia's soldiers at the time fought bravely, endured much hardship, and were led by men that actually had a good deal of concern about their welfare, unlike Stalin in World War Two.

Although Lieven includes a good number of maps, none of them show any of the campaigns' troop movements, making them essentially useless. And Lieven describes much of this history in terms of a balance-of-power calculus, even though the nations of the Napoleonic era were not really modern and European nationalism was just in its infancy. Nor does Lieven really provide much insight into people's character; in too many instances he describes almost every Russian character as "brave" or "courageous", often as much three times on a single page, even when the activity described is something as simple as marching.

Sid Singh says

The Napoleonic wars are a fascinating period of European history and there are few books written on the "Eastern Front" of the war. I had high hopes for Lievin's work. Unfortunately, this book epitomizes the types of books that kill readers interest in history.

The author's writing style is very dry and the book reads like a textbook written for a graduate course in Russian History. Lieven has absolutely no literary skills; rather he inundates the reader with tedious detail after detail that actually causes you to lose the narrative of events. Then, coupled with the fact that he fails to actually present information in a reasonable chronology, the books quickly becomes a serious chore without any actual value. There are nuggets of interesting history buried somewhere within the dross of useless filler, but Lieven's writing style doesn't really encourage the effort needed to find it.

I would also note that the book is clearly written for people who already have substantial knowledge of the Napoleonic wars and the Napoleonic era. For a historic work, the author provides no real context for the events unfolding in the book. The reader is directly thrust into nuanced and rather detailed accounts of Russia's internal politics, geopolitical machinations, and battles. A good history book, particularly about a topic that is not necessarily well known, should provide some context. Heck, even books on WW2, which one presumes most readers are intimately familiar, at least provide some sense of how Hitler came to power,

European politics after WW1, etc. Thus, you have a sense of time and place. Lieven completely fails in this task. Quite frankly, without such context, unless you are a graduated student or someone deeply invested in Napoleonic history, you have no understanding of why you should really care about Napoleon in Russia.

I would NOT recommend this book unless you are planning on writing a thesis on Russia and Napoleon. This is not an enjoyable read for amateur historians or lay readers.

Jwduke says

The only book I have ever seen which presents the Russian perspective (and indeed that of Alexander I) clearly. This book is very well written, but can be dry in places. The dryness cannot be limited, as the dry writings are necessary. 80% of the book, especially the early chapters, was engaging. I could not put it down. Towards the end and the fall of Paris, I started to lose interest. That is no fault of the book or the writer, being familiar with the history and what took place made it difficult to read and study it; again. I am giving it four out of five stars. However, If you are not familiar with the history, you would more than likely give it a five as the writing would keep the novice engaged.

Lauren Albert says

I thought that surely a book this long (around 525 pages) would be about a lot more than strategy and such. But the majority of it was indeed military. I'm giving it 4 stars for two reasons:

1. He manages to make the military stuff interesting even to me.
2. Someone who likes military history would find it a very good read.

His central premise is simple--Russia did a lot more to defeat Napoleon than they are given credit for. I don't know about you, but he is right that I was taught (or picked up somewhere) that Napoleon was defeated by the Russian winter, not the Russians. He makes a very good case and is very thorough with his research.

Would you have thought that a shortage of carts would be a major problem for both sides? It makes sense, but I wouldn't have thought of it--it would do them no good to have food for the men and the horses or weapons and ammunition if they couldn't transport it. It was little details like that that made the military history interesting to me.

Hadrian says

It is a common misconception, popularized by nationalist sentiments and even Tolstoy himself, that the Russian army was not responsible as it truly was for the defeat of Napoleon in the East. General Winter is most often credited.

This book is a worthy corrective to some of the misconceptions of the Russian campaign - that is, Russia was more responsible for defeating Napoleon than is given credit - by such preeminent sources as The Campaigns of Napoleon, and Tolstoy. The Russian state, although primitive and somewhat lacking in both a social and economic/industrial sense, was led by competent and farsighted leaders who made necessary

strategic preparations for defeating an invasion of such magnitude.

Strategic withdrawal was necessary, as well as a total war. Napoleon's army, although excellent in pitched battle, was incapable of sustained guerilla or total wars, as demonstrated in the Peninsular campaign.

Alexander I, in particular, is given credit for forming an alliance system, often by 'the scruff of his neighbors necks', as he bargained their compliance.

Even in peacetime, Russia threw its weight around, redrawing the territorial lines of Europe in the Congress of Berlin, redrawing German and Polish states according to their demands.

These campaigns still have very much to teach us, and Lieven does very well in bringing new facts to light.

Only major complaint is that some better maps would have been useful. It's hard to keep track of military campaigns without them.

William Shieber says

Sometimes reality beats fiction. In this case, the reality is that Alexander I knew what he was doing. In 1812, Russia defeated Napoleon's invasion not merely because of the tenacity of the Russian spirit or because it's cold in winter, but because Alexander and Barclay de Tolly had prepared for the invasion. Thereafter, Alexander nurtured a military coalition with Prussia and Austria which combined to drive Napoleon out of Germany. Within two years of the invasion of Russia, the Coalition army marched into Paris, with Alexander at its head.

It's a remarkable story, and Lieven tells it well.

Ed says

I found this in my local bookstore Nicola's and was immediately taken because it turned over most of what I thought I knew about Napoleon's campaign in Russia. Namely that he was defeated by his own over reach and the Russian winter. This book makes the case that he was beaten by superior strategy, fighting forces and tactics, though no doubt winter and over-reach helped. And I had forgotten that the Russians actually pursued the French all the way back to Paris and were part of the allied group that occupied it. An echo of the 1945 end game in Berlin. I am a 100 pages in and it is really well researched and gripping...with lots on things like the Russians ability to breed tough flexible cavalry horses which is the sort of underlying detail I enjoy... More when I have finished

Bryan Alexander says

A fine history of the epic 1812-1815 war between the Russia and French empires, *Russia Against Napoleon* rewards both the general reader and the student of the Napoleonic wars.

Dominic Lieven tells a vast story, beginning with Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, then the German

wars of 1813 (which include the biggest battle in European history by that time), and concluding with the 1814 invasion of France and (first) defeat of Napoleon. Readers new to this subject will be well treated by Lieven's combination of good organization, narrative skill, and attention to historical actors.

The book's main achievement is to recast the events from a Russian perspective. Lieven makes a convincing case for tsar Alexander I's leadership and strategic thinking, both in military affairs and especially in diplomacy. Alexander conceived of a massive, sustained war, which became

the longest campaign in European history, in less than two years the Russian army had marched from Vilna to Moscow and then all the way back across Europe to Paris. (513)

. Alexander did so despite the different wishes of part-time allies, notably Austria, who did not always want to end Napoleon's rule. Indeed, Alexander, his advisors, and his generals appear as the leading strategic force of the late Napoleonic period:

One key reason why Russia defeated Napoleon was that its leaders out-thought him.(526)

In short, Lieven returns Russia to a central role in the Napoleonic period.

Narratively, this means several things. First, *Russia Against Napoleon* spends time showing the build up and maturation of the Russian army over time, developing through horrific experience into a world-class fighting machine. Readers may be familiar with accounts celebrating the defensive ferocity of Russian forces opposing the invaders in 1812, but less aware of those forces' improvements in 1813-14. Details here may blur in the mind of a reader new to the period, but are worth absorbing. Second, the book offers a rich and powerful treatment of the 1812 invasion, including good observations about Russia's grand strategy. Third, this means a Russian-centric view of the 1813 and 1814 campaigns, which I found welcome after reading many accounts emphasizing the French and German roles.

Lieven concludes by seeing Russia's triumph as a sign of the *ancien régime*'s potency in the face of modernity. This is a powerful corrective to a progressive reading of history, and also a useful glimpse into Russian culture and its fondness for autocracy. It also lets us take seriously Alexander's achievement in areas usually seen as wins for modernity: espionage, logistical support, and organizational overhauls.

Russia Against Napoleon is also superbly grounded in Russian primary sources. Lieven immersed himself in Russian archives, especially those available after the USSR's fall, giving many rich supports to his narrative and argument.

Let me add one additional item of praise in favor of the book's maps. I'm very picky about historical works and their cartographic presentation. All too often books' maps are incomplete, hard to read, or don't serve the text. In contrast *Russia Against Napoleon* offers maps that are a joy for the reader: clear to read and well linked to the text. I could always find where actions took place - this is all too rare, and merits an additional star.

Recommended.

Betsy says

This book details the years 1812-14 when France battled Russia once again after several unsuccessful campaigns by Russia in 1805 and 1807. I knew little about the Russian effort when I started reading, except for the famous 1812 campaign. That campaign comprises a small part of this book because the author spends much more time developing an understanding of how the Russians turned things around in the intervening years. He also concentrates on the uniting of Prussian, Austrian and Russian forces, which fought France in 1813-4.

This is not a book for a beach read. It is complicated, and it is obvious that the author is an admirer of Tsar Alexander and the Russians. In fact, some of his relatives were part of the Russian establishment during the period. There are maps, but they are at the beginning so are not help as you are reading along.

It is an informative book, but sometimes it is slow-going. It did reinforce my admiration for Barclay de Tolly, which I had formed earlier. He had a difficult job as Commander-in-Chief, but did it well despite the prejudices of many of other officers. The other famous Russian generals are also discussed in detail. It may not be the book for everybody, but you will learn a lot.

Justin says

Professor Lieven spends a little too much time bemoaning the distorted lens (French, English, & Prussian) through which posterity has viewed the Napoleonic period. He must concede that the distortion is somewhat borne out of necessity: *La Grande Armee* which invaded Russia in 1812-- consisting of a French plurality accompanied by Germans, Italians, Spaniards, Poles, Austrians, Prussians, Swiss, and Portuguese--was a fairly literate (and in some instances, graphophilic) host; that Tsar Alexander's army of illiterate serfs did not hand down to us a comparable trove of diaries, letters, dispatches, and reminiscences should not be surprising.

That being said, this is a good, solid piece of history that makes use of Russian archival sources that have been mostly unavailable to Western scholars over the last two centuries. Its scope is appropriately (and necessarily) broad, and the narrative doesn't stop with Marshal Ney's exploits as the last of Napoleon's soldiers to leave Russian soil; contrary to most accounts of the Franco-Russian War of 1812 (the real "War of 1812" for all non-American observers), Lieven aims at a continuous narrative that demonstrates how essential Russia was to bringing France to her knees in 1813-14, and how it was that Cossacks made their way to the Champs-Elysees.

Lieven does an admirable job of re-assessing the due credit and blame for the disastrous French invasion, though again, he is to a certain extent spitting into the wind: when history's greatest general assembles (to that point in time) history's largest army, the analysis is naturally going to tend toward "What went wrong?" for Napoleon, rather than "How did the Russians prevail?". History is of course rarely that simple--had General Junot, to take one example, done as ordered and thrown his corps across the Russian line of retreat after Smolensk (16-18 August, 1812), the bulk of Barclay's army would have been smashed, and the outcome of the campaign could have been quite different.

But setting aside the many things that the French did to thwart their own cause, Lieven makes clear that it was superior leadership on the political and strategic levels that ensured Russian victory. The unpopular, foreign-born Barclay de Tolly's even more unpopular decision to retreat before *La Grande Armee* bore more than a little resemblance to Fabius Cunctator's evasion of Hannibal, and the wisdom of this strategy was borne out by Kutuzov's decision to stand and fight at Borodino: even sapped of much of its strength by desertion, detachments, hunger, and disease, *La Grande Armee*, 800 leagues from Paris, was still invincible.

And if Barclay's strategy of shadowing the French march to Moscow was successful, then Kutuzov's pursuit of Napoleon on the retreat from Moscow was doubly so: by forcing the French to retreat back down the Smolensk-Moscow highway, which had already been thoroughly pillaged and ravaged, Kutuzov assured its virtual destruction by the time he sprung his trap at the Beresina, which very nearly came off in a way that would have shortened Napoleon's first reign by sixteen months.

Above all else, Lieven emphasizes that it was Tsar Alexander's political will that ensured Napoleon's defeat. He never had any intention of treating with the Emperor, and nothing short of the total annihilation of the Russian army would make him reconsider. Time and space were the Tsar's allies, and he made no secret of this fact, even to Armand de Caulaincourt (Napoleon's envoy to St. Petersburg, his confidant, and his Master of Horse during the invasion), whose futile attempts to dissuade Napoleon from invading Russia were met with the famed tug-of-the-ear and pinch-of-the-cheek that were to be found whenever the Imperial charm was on display. Even "the most competent human being who ever lived," as Napoleon was described by Israeli historian Martin van Creveld, should have heeded the advice of others from time to time.

Lieven provides a useful corrective to much of the historiography on this subject, illustrating a broad context within which it becomes possible to see the Russians as decisive agents of their own great triumph, rather than being merely the beneficiaries of Napoleonic blunders and/or Mother Nature. Perhaps it is true to say Napoleon was doomed from the moment that he launched his army into Russia; however, it is just as true to say that it was inspired and canny Russian leadership which ensured that result.
