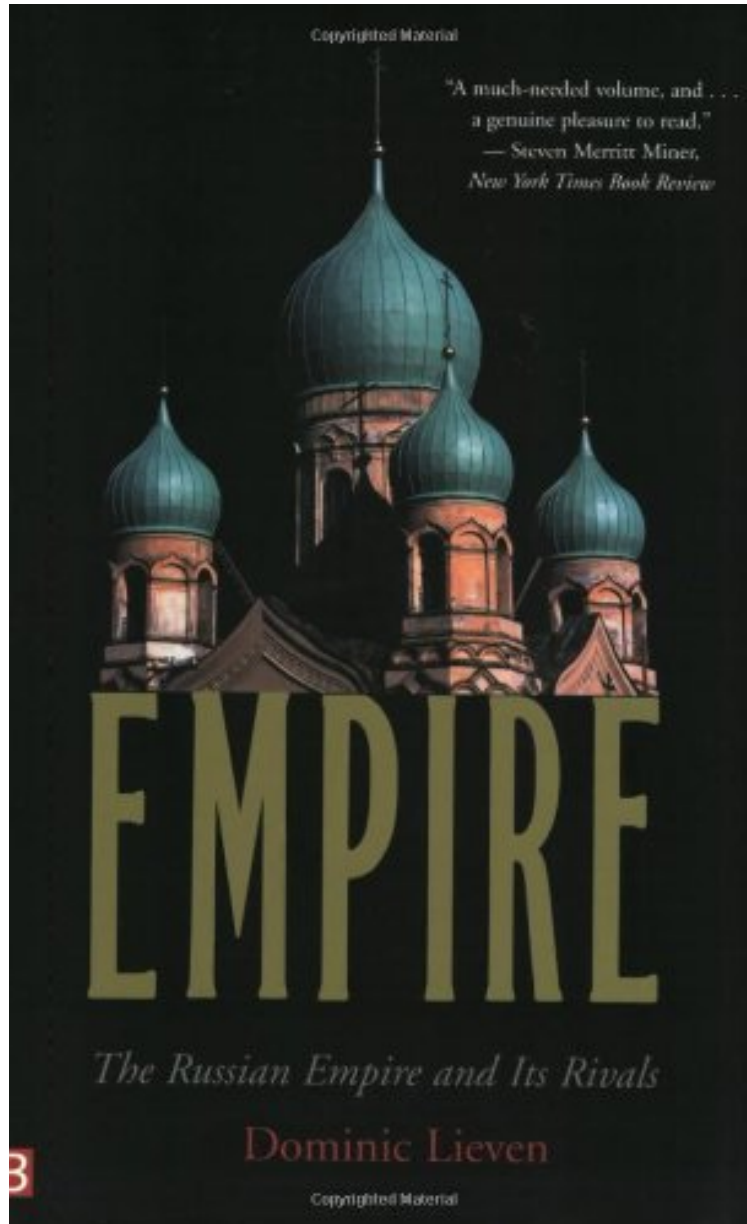


[Download] Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals

## Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals

*Mr. Dominic Lieven, Dominic Lieven*

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**Mr. Dominic Lieven, Dominic Lieven : Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Unlocking the secrets of RussiaBy batteryBobRead everything by this brilliant writer if you want to understand Russia22 of 28 people found the following review helpful. Rambling, but

not uninteresting. By Antonio Dominic Lieven, the historian of Imperial Russia (he is the author a very cogent biography of Czar Nicholas II), has written a long book on a big subject. In spite of the broad title ("Empire"), the book, as suggested by the sub-title, is really a comparison between modern continental European empires (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Soviet) and a modern Atlantic Empire (British). He also takes a couple of stabs at the Chinese empire, although wisely steers away from making many points about this subject, which is likely to suck in the unwary. He does not attempt a definition of empire as such, and while acknowledging the socio-geographical school of thought (pioneered by Montesquieu and currently incarnated in Huntington), largely steers clear of "German-philosophy-type-First-Principles" and such. This is a relief, because he has much to say just looking at actual facts. Although he concludes that, after the (probably terminal) eclipse of France as a continental great power after the First Empire, the real competition is between Germany and Russia, and that when one is in the ascendant (as was Germany in 1871-1945 and since 1990) the other one is in the relapse (Russia was ascendant between the Vienna Congress and the creation of the German Reich). While his arguments are intuitively appealing, Lieven does not say enough about Germany proper (the "Drang Nach Osten", for example) to support this contention, given that his focus is on the Southern part of cultural Germany, the Austro-Hungarian empire. As a historian of Ukraine, Lieven observes that the Russian heartland is Ukraine and that Russia may not be a great power separated from Ukraine, which raises the ugly likelihood of a future annexation of Ukraine and other neighbouring territories of historical, cultural or military significance by the extant Russia, not unlike what Germany did with the Saarland, the Sudetenland and other regions, prior to invading Poland and precipitating we-know-what. What is clear is that Russia is not likely to remain within its current borders, which have stripped out virtually all territorial gains made by the successive Russian and Soviet Regimes since Peter the Great at least. He points out that Russia has experienced three modernization waves: one, starting with Peter the Great and probably "petering" out with the disappointments of Alexander I and the regression of Nicholas I (i.e., circa 1700 to 1825), the second one starting with the liberation of the serfs by Alexander II and extending to the Soviet times, winding down with the ossification of the regime with Breznev and Andropov after a failure by Kruschev to re-ignite the revolutionary fires (1861-1964), and a third one started by Gorbachov and still apparently in full swing (1985-Present). Given that each renewal was accompanied by a period of Russian Hegemony (the first one culminated during the second half of the XVIII century, under Catherine the Great and the second one in the 1940s and 1950s, under Stalin and Kruschev), it is clear that Lieven believes that a Russian comeback is waiting around the corner, hard is it may be to believe this now. Very perceptively, Lieven notes that growing unrest with Islamic nations can only lead to a rapprochement between the USA and Russia. This was published in 2000, well before 9-11 and the current entente cordiale between the 2 great nations. He also has a few things to say concerning current multi-lingual "empires", such as Malaysia, Indonesia and (surprise, surprise) the European Union. As may be expected with an author writing on this subject, he has antipathy towards nationalism and thinks that such "empires" may yet make a comeback. But he acknowledges that they are not sustainable absent an over-arching ideology powerful to overcome nationalism, such as counter-reformation in the Habsburg Empire in XVI and XVII centuries or Communism in the Soviet Union (or Nazism in the Third Reich, or Islam in the Ottoman Empire). Whether contemporary multinational "empires" have such ideologies is not obvious (particularly deficient in this respect is the European Union). Although Lieven is erudite and writes engagingly, and in spite of the interest of his mildly revisionist views on the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, I missed some of the other empires that competed with the Russians in their quest for continental mastery. A small chapter dealing with the Baltics (Polish, Swedish and Lithuanians) would have been useful. A major rival empire that fought Russia not once but twice within the XX century, Japan, is barely mentioned. And British rivalry with Russia in the context of the "Big Game" (over Afghanistan) also is mentioned only in passing. Still, it's difficult not to like such a sane writer, who clearly sees that apparatchik kleptocrats such as those lording it over most of the former Soviet Union (and some of its satellites) are probably preferable to gaunt, angry cultural nationalists who are still waiting on the wings and sometimes getting their licks in (when the two groups merge, as in Milosevic's Serbia, the results are scary indeed). The same point was made perhaps more humoristically by P.J. O'Rourke in some of his earlier books. He sees very clearly that the Soviet Union was just a nastier version of the Russian empire and faced some of the same problems, such as dealing with large, rich, culturally distinct "colonies" (such as Poland). He clearly misses the multi-cultural empires such as the Austro-Hungarian empire (a short detour on the Spanish-Italo-Belgian empire would not have been amiss either), which he believes looks positively dazzling when compared with the hellishness of Hitler's Ostmark and the colonization of Soviet times. Whether his domesticated empires (of which the European Union is the most recent version) will survive is anybody's guess.

7 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Basic and a little flawed but has some insights... By Andrew Mendelsohn I picked up this book on a whim expecting to be impressed. I think for the most part the author succeeds in his aims, however, as one of the other reviewers stated the writing style is incredibly stilted and self-impressed, and the book's organization leaves much to be desired. Also, frankly, in some areas the book is incredibly lacking. Lieven is a Russia scholar. His treatment of ethnic rivalries and issues of stability in the former Soviet republics gets a grand total of perhaps ten pages, and those are so basic as to be worthless. Moldavia more or less got the most coverage, and other places were either glossed over quickly or, worse, covered as if he were relating

information he acquired from a newspaper article. I should say, while I am not a professional historian I do have a degree in history from Berkeley, and I have spent over a year aggregate time in Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, etc. Lieven paints a quasi-tolerant view of the current regime in Ukraine. In part, this is true - there is no open revolt... but, having said this Ukraine went through an extensive de-russification process a few years ago. Ukrainian became the sold language of higher learning, official employment, etc; even literature museums (Gogol) were shut down. His treatment of the situation in Tajikistan was laughable - a paragraph or two. The only reason this conflict didn't involve a massive body count was the low populations involved. In fact, there were three main factions, not two, and fighting continued (with Russian occupation) well past the dates mentioned. Further, until recently there was sporadic fighting in the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan as well. I think part of the problem was a basic British/European bias on Mr. Lieven's part. At one point in the book, he seems to imply the current American political dominance happened at the behest of the British; British Empire was portrayed almost as a retiring old man ceding control of the family business to the Americans. I think, frankly, this is in part European arrogance coupled with a poor choice of words and lax editing. During his summation about the Hapsburgs, Lieven took a short section and wrote about the rise of anti-semitism in the hyper-nationalists states that filled the void left by the Hapsburg Empire. He related how the Jews had a large share of the economy and capital and how by their economic position they were 'asking for trouble.' I am Jewish, but I am not particularly a Zionist, or religious, or overly sensitive... I am certainly not implying that the book or the author is anti-semitic. However, I'm at a loss how anybody could intelligently write that an ethnic group about to face near extinction could be 'asking for it' under any circumstances? Lieven goes at great lengths to point out anti-semitism, but this one statement was so monumentally stupid. I would say the book is a good overview, despite its weak points, but it is, as one of the other reviewers stated, somewhat tedious. It is also flawed in some areas, and weak in others. My opinion is that if you are bright enough to read this book, then you are bright enough to read something a little more in depth and then reach your own conclusions.

How does one empire differ from another? Why do empires rise and fall? What has made empires flourish in some eras and regions of the world but not in others? In this broad and ambitious book, Dominic Lieven explores the place and meaning of empire from ancient Rome to the present. The central focus of the book is Russia and the rise and fall of the Tsarist and the Soviet Empires. The overwhelming majority of works on empire concentrate on the European maritime powers. Lieven's comparative approach highlights the important role played by Russia in the expansion of Europe and its rise to global dominance. The book contrasts the nature, strategies, and fate of empire in Russia with that of its major rivals, the Habsburg, Ottoman, and British empires, and considers a broad range of other cases from ancient China and Rome to the present-day United States, Indonesia, India, and the European Union. Many of the dilemmas of empire persist in today's world, and Lieven throws new light on some of the most intractable current examples, including the crisis in the former Soviet Union, the troubles in Ulster, and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. This major examination of the imperial experience presents history on the grandest scale, combining formidable erudition with stimulating readability.

[A] work of majestic sweep. . . . Heavy with erudition, Lieven's work brims with grand judgements. -- Stephen Kotkin, *The New Republic* From the Back Cover "An ambitious study comparing the Russian empire with those of Britain, the Hapsburgs and the Ottomans. This is a much-needed volume, and it is a genuine pleasure to read. . . . By comparing the Russian situation with those of other empires, . . . Lieven is able to show with much greater force and nuance how certain social conditions often portrayed as peculiarly Russian in fact derived from the imperial drive to defend a sprawling multinational empire against better-financed and more secure enemies." -Steven Merritt Miner, *New York Times Book Review* About the Author Dominic Lieven, a former Kennedy scholar at Harvard University, is professor of Russian government at the London School of Economics. Among his many publications are the highly praised *Nicholas II and Russia's Rulers under the Old Regime*, published by Yale University Press.