



## RUSSIA'S REVOLUTION: ESSAYS 1989–2006

By Leon Aron

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At a time when Russia is reasserting its influence abroad and undergoing a reemergence of repressive tendencies at home, Leon Aron, author of the acclaimed biography *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life*, presents his newest work, *Russia's Revolution: Essays 1989–2006* (AEI Press, April 2007).

In this collection of twenty-one important essays, Aron brings together his observations of the last great revolution of the twentieth century, which began with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and continues today in Putin's Russia. Aron explores the broad range of political, economic, social, and cultural developments in Russia in the last fifteen years, ranging from the vagaries of privatization to the recovery of Russia's glorious gastronomic tradition to the challenges of postauthoritarian life as seen through the eyes of Boris Akunin, the bestselling Russian mystery writer. Aron also prepares us for the possible crises ahead, such as the 2008 Russian presidential election, the growing demographic crisis of an aging and unhealthy population, and the fallout from a potentially bankrupt state-owned pension system. Anyone interested in understanding the changes Russia has undergone should read this book.

Among the book's highlights:

**Understanding Russia's Foreign Policy:** Because of divergent and increasingly incompatible ideological agendas, U.S.-Russian relations have been unraveling since 2003. Russian foreign policy is no longer oriented toward the West, and is aggressively seeking short-term political, economic, and diplomatic advantages (as, for example, in Iran). Unfulfilled expectations eat away at the goal of "equality and respect for Russia," and conflicts have arisen as a result of the George W. Bush administration's activist foreign policy. Topics addressed by Aron range from nuclear proliferation and NATO's encroachment in Russia's sphere of influence to Russia's acceptance into the WTO.

**Understanding Russian Domestic Policy:** The rollback of democracy and self-rule by the Kremlin is the result of new domestic political and economic priorities. Aron particularly analyzes the return to the traditional view of Russian society: the state is tantamount, and all that is good for the state is good for the country. The strengthening of the state means the strengthening of society.

**The New Russian Army:** For 300 years, Russians have drafted men into the army. Despite calls for an all-volunteer armed forces, the Putin regime has been unwilling to part with this relic of a state-dominated society. As a result, the Russian army remains dysfunctional and full of corrupt and negligent officers who brutalize conscripts, many of whom have turned to crime and illegal drugs. Peacetime injuries, deaths, and desertion are almost daily occurrences.

**Russian Oil:** Russia has between 6 and 10 percent of the world's known oil reserves. Last year, Russia pumped an average of 9.4 million barrels of oil a day and exported around 7 million barrels a day, occasionally outstripping Saudi Arabia in monthly production. High oil prices in the past six years have brought billions of dollars to the treasury, boosted personal incomes, and enhanced Russia's position in the world. But increased government control of the economy and the expansion of the state's role in energy production and distribution may lead to decreased oil exports.

The YUKOS affair has profound implications for companies interested in doing business in Russia. It represents the scaling down (or even the abandonment) of the liberal reforms of the 1990s and seems to herald a sharp turn toward economic and political recentralization. This setback of Russia's progress toward developing a modern justice system demonstrates not only the nature and the extent of state control over the economy, but also the role of big business and personal wealth in what is still a very poor and state-bound society.

**The New Russian Media:** Although current news broadcasts no longer resemble the no-holds-barred versions that were common during the Yeltsin era, journalists today are not jailed for their writings, and even the most vociferous critics of the regime are able to publish. Local networks are more independent and less censored than national central channels. Aron believes that this balancing act cannot be sustained for long. He predicts a shift to either a full-blown classic authoritarianism, or a reaffirmation of the revolutionary legacy of freedom of the media. The next few years will tell.

*Russia's Revolution* shows us where Russia has been in the past fifteen years and where it is going. Aron details both the political and cultural developments in life in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union and, with meticulousness and vivid details, records and analyzes the events, triumphs, and setbacks of the 1991 revolution. Only someone who has closely watched Russia all his life—and is intimate with its history, culture, and language—could provide such a wealth of details and keen insights about Russia.

**Leon Aron** is available for interviews and can be reached at [LAron@aei.org](mailto:LAron@aei.org) (assistant 202.828.6025 or [IKhrestin@aei.org](mailto:IKhrestin@aei.org)).

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Advance Praise for *Russia's Revolution*

“Leon Aron has long been an invaluable source of common sense, deep knowledge, and historical perspective on the country of his birth. All his skills and insight are on display in *Russia's Revolution*, a timely, compelling summation of his wisdom about one of the most important sagas of our time.”

—Strobe Talbott, deputy secretary of state (1994–2001)  
and president of the Brookings Institution

“Leon Aron is one of the most astute observers of Russian politics in the world today. Everything he writes is simply ‘must read’ material. His essays have the rare ability to combine sharp analytical statements with meticulous research. To have his articles from the last two decades collected in a single volume is an invaluable resource for any serious student of Russian politics, economics, and culture.”

—Michael McFaul, professor of political science and Hoover fellow, Stanford University

“Leon Aron is one of our very best witnesses to, and analysts of, the new Russia. His collected essays track two decades of the changes within Russia itself and in Russian and Western opinion of them. But they also present a consistent Aron voice that deserves to be heard—judicious, broad (as much at home in literature or the restaurant scene as in arms control or privatization), sanely optimistic, and invariably rendered in graceful yet unpretentious prose.”

—Timothy J. Colton, professor of government and director, Davis Center  
for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University

“Leon Aron is perhaps the most erudite, insightful, and indeed, empathetic analyst of the trials and tribulations of Russia's troubled revolution. This collection of essays, dating back to the glasnost period in the 1980s and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union to Russia's remarkable recovery today, will make for terrific reading for both seasoned Russian experts as well as the uninitiated trying to make sense of Russia. In a field not renowned for its predictive success, Aron's essays are as fresh and insightful today as when originally written.”

—Andrew Kuchins, director and senior fellow, Russia and Eurasia Program,  
Center for Strategic and International Studies

“This is a riveting and highly literate account of Russia's revolution against communism. Leon Aron possesses one of the finest and most penetrating minds studying contemporary Russia. Aron revives the fury against the Soviet system, and emphasizes the depth of the revolutionary changes Boris Yeltsin set in motion, while also acknowledging the many unfortunate reversals spearheaded by Vladimir Putin. Read this book and you sense how much Russia has been transformed!”

—Anders Åslund, senior fellow, Peterson Institute for International Economics

“Leon Aron stands out among the West's top Russia experts as a person with a 360-degree vision. He is a political scientist, sociologist, and historian, endowed with a keen understanding of the Russian economy and a passion for Russian literature and the arts. This book is a testimony to his unique breadth, which allows the reader to see ever-changing Russia as an integrated whole.”

—Dmitri Trenin, senior associate and deputy director of the Carnegie  
Endowment for International Peace's Moscow Center

“In a series of essays that range from the war in Chechnya to the restaurant scene in the new Moscow, Leon Aron proves himself to be an exceptional guide to Russia's transformation. His essays are sharp, opinionated, at times provocative, and always a good read. They emphasize the progress that Russia has made despite the ups and downs of the last fifteen years, and remind us that Russia's revolution is far from finished.”

—Timothy Frye, professor of political science, Columbia University