



# Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917, Enlarged Edition

*Geoffrey Hosking*

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The Soviet Union crumbles and Russia rises from the rubble, once again the great nation--a perfect scenario, but for one point: Russia was never a nation. And this, says the eminent historian Geoffrey Hosking, is at the heart of the Russians' dilemma today, as they grapple with the rudiments of nationhood. His book is about the Russia that never was, a three-hundred-year history of empire building at the expense of national identity.

Russia begins in the sixteenth century, with the inception of one of the most extensive and diverse empires in history. Hosking shows how this undertaking, the effort of conquering, defending, and administering such a huge mixture of territories and peoples, exhausted the productive powers of the common people and enfeebled their civic institutions. Neither church nor state was able to project an image of "Russian-ness" that could unite elites and masses in a consciousness of belonging to the same nation. Hosking depicts two Russias, that of the gentry and of the peasantry, and reveals how the gap between them, widened by the Tsarist state's repudiation of the Orthodox messianic myth, continued to grow throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Here we see how this myth, on which the empire was originally based, returned centuries later in the form of the revolutionary movement, which eventually swept away the Tsarist Empire but replaced it with an even more universalist one. Hosking concludes his story in 1917, but shows how the conflict he describes continues to affect Russia right up to the present day.

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