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## The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev

By *Daniel Treisman*



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**The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev** By Daniel Treisman

In this critically acclaimed book, now available in paperback, noted scholar Daniel Treisman offers a refreshing and exhaustively reported look at the political, economic, and cultural changes in Russia, with an in-depth examination of the modern state and its role in global affairs.

Almost twenty-five years after Mikhail Gorbachev began radically reshaping his country, Russia has changed beyond recognition. In his third book on this subject, Professor Daniel Treisman takes stock of the country that has emerged from the debris of Soviet communism and addresses the questions that preoccupy scholars of its history and politics: Why did the Soviet Union disintegrate? Could its collapse have been avoided? Did Yeltsin destroy too much or too little of the Soviet political order? What explains Putin's unprecedented popularity with the Russian public?

Based on two decades of research and his own experiences in the country, Treisman cuts through the scholarly and journalistic debates to provide a portrait of a country returning to the international community on its own terms. At a time when global politics are more important than ever, *The Return* illuminates the inner workings of a country that has increasingly come to influence, and which will continue to shape, American foreign policy and world events.



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## The Return: Russia's Journey from Gorbachev to Medvedev By Daniel Treisman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #750670 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Free Press
- Published on: 2012-01-10
- Released on: 2012-01-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.81" h x 1.60" w x 5.81" l, 1.23 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 544 pages



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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. UCLA professor Treisman (*Without a Map*) explores the path of postcommunist Russia in this engrossing study. While Gorbachev transformed his country through nuclear disarmament, glasnost, and perestroika and allowed the Berlin Wall to come down, and Yeltsin introduced Russians to competitive elections, a democratic constitution, and (putative) freedom of the press, it is the autocratic Putin--a former KGB agent who rolled back some of his predecessors' reforms--who remains popular even in his current role as prime minister to President Dmitri Medvedev. Drawing on two decades of research, Treisman analyzes the paradoxes in Russian politics and society, illuminating why the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. wasn't more violent, the repercussions of the Chechen wars, the "sacred place" vodka holds in the Russian imagination (and its pernicious effect on Russia's demographics), and how, 20 years after the fall of communism, relations between Russia and the U.S. remain so frosty. Yet as Treisman convincingly argues, most of the world's international problems--nuclear proliferation, Islamic terrorism, global warming--will be difficult to solve without Russia's help. (Jan.)

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From [Booklist](#)

The politics and economics of post-Communist Russia occupy this survey of the past two decades. Treisman, a UCLA political science professor, works commentary about Russia's successive leaders—Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev—into the problems they confronted. Holding that the USSR could have muddled along for a while, Treisman depicts Gorbachev as overconfident, heedless of what actually unified the multinational USSR: coercion and censorship. When everybody ran for the exits in 1991, it fell to Yeltsin to corral the stampede. Treisman accords considerable credit to the policies of the burly Siberian, noting that breakup of the USSR could have been much more violent, with Chechnya a glaring exception. However, the 1990s turbulent privatization and economic decline presaged centripetal political force, of which Vladimir Putin became the agent. Treisman's assessment of Putinism in the 2000s observes its authoritarian strengthening of Russia at some expense to political and economic liberalism. Encompassing foreign policy and Russian public opinion, Treisman's knowledgeable presentation is a reliable current-affairs source for Russia's economic revival and reassertion in international affairs. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"A crisp, unromantic overview of the rocky Russian journey to join the world markets....A tight, modern, and relevant study of the 'Russia that has returned.'"--*Kirkus Reviews*

"The comprehensiveness and clarity of *The Return* make it a valuable resource for anyone trying to make sense of the puzzle that is Russia."--*Dallas Morning News*

"Treisman explores the path of postcommunist Russia in this engrossing study."--*Publishers Weekly*

"This excellent book provides both an elegant and comprehensive account of Russia's turbulent history over the last quarter century and penetrating and sometimes surprising analyses of the main political and economic issues that that history raises."

--Michael Mandelbaum, author, *The Frugal Superpower: America's Global Leadership in a Cash-Strapped Era*

“Daniel Treisman treats us to an elegant and learned history that demystifies Russia’s transformation from a communist state to a normal country. This is the best and most readable account of Russia’s rebirth.”

--Anders Åslund, Senior Fellow, Peterson Institute for International Economics

“Daniel Treisman has written a book about Russia today that is calm, sane, judicious, very well informed, and written in the kind of prose that makes you want to read on. It is a welcome and necessary antidote to much fashionable Western writing that portrays Russia as a kleptocracy ruled by a secret policeman intent on victory in a new Cold War.... Russia has certainly returned. Whether we like it or not we are likely, if we want to achieve our own objectives, to find ourselves having to treat the Russians with the respect they believe they deserve, and can increasingly command.”

--Rodric Braithwaite, former UK ambassador to the Soviet Union and Russia, author of *Across the Moscow River: The World Turned Upside Down* and *Moscow 1941: A City and Its People at War*

“Possessing both deft storytelling abilities and deep scholarly knowledge, Treisman provides a truly masterful exposition of the tumultuous past two decades in Russian history, politics, and society. Anyone interested in Russia and its leaders should read this book.”

--James Goldgeier, George Washington University

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Evelyn Looney:**

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