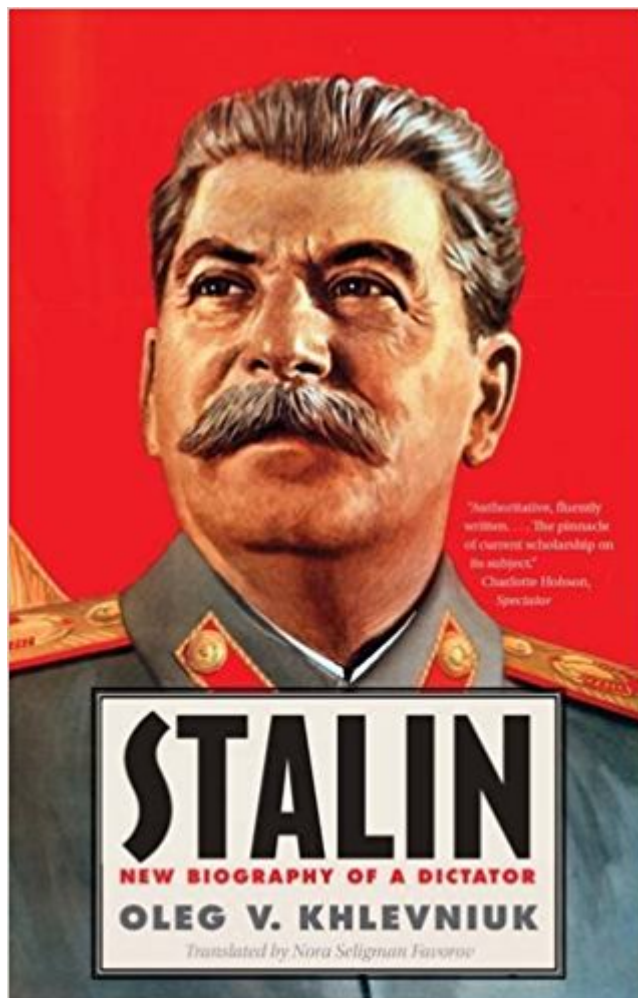


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# Stalin: New Biography Of A Dictator



## Synopsis

The most authoritative and engrossing biography of the notorious dictator ever written Josef Stalin exercised supreme power in the Soviet Union from 1929 until his death in 1953. During that quarter-century, by Oleg Khlevniuk's estimate, he caused the imprisonment and execution of no fewer than a million Soviet citizens per year. Millions more were victims of famine directly resulting from Stalin's policies. What drove him toward such ruthlessness? This essential biography, by the author most deeply familiar with the vast archives of the Soviet era, offers an unprecedented, fine-grained portrait of Stalin the man and dictator. Without mythologizing Stalin as either benevolent or an evil genius, Khlevniuk resolves numerous controversies about specific events in the dictator's life while assembling many hundreds of previously unknown letters, memos, reports, and diaries into a comprehensive, compelling narrative of a life that altered the course of world history. In brief, revealing prologues to each chapter, Khlevniuk takes his reader into Stalin's favorite dacha, where the innermost circle of Soviet leadership gathered as their *vozhdy* lay dying. Chronological chapters then illuminate major themes: Stalin's childhood, his involvement in the Revolution and the early Bolshevik government under Lenin, his assumption of undivided power and mandate for industrialization and collectivization, the Terror, World War II, and the postwar period. At the book's conclusion, the author presents a cogent warning against nostalgia for the Stalinist era.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[A] beautifully constructed, lucid, and brief new life of the dictator. . . . Written with fluent sobriety

and humour the book is a constant pleasure to read. No book of history is ever definitive: new facts trickle out, new writers bring new perspectives to bear. This is the charm of the genre. But some history books can become classics for layer generations. Khlevniuk's Stalin is likely to be one of them."

•Rodric Braithwaite, *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies*"A very digestible biography, yet one packed with revelations. . . . If you read just one biography this year, make it this one."

•Paul E. Richardson, *Russian Life*"Superb . . . deeply informed and utterly compelling . . . What [Khlevniuk] highlights is so frequently new and revealing that the portrait in the end seems more accurate and complete than anything before."

•Fedorov's masterful translation from the Russian preserves the book's spare, penetrating prose."

•Robert Legvold, *Foreign Affairs*"By the amount and quality of information presented, [Stalin: New Biography] surpasses all other biographies on Stalin previously published inside or outside Russia."

•Alexander Gogun, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*"The book is attractively organized and presented. . . . This is a brisk, exciting and compelling read."

•J. Arch Getty, *Slavic Review*"Oleg Khlevniuk is incontestably the best Russian student of Soviet history. In this biography, he uses his experience and talents to give us an innovative and convincing portrait of the Soviet 'micromanaging' despot. The chapters dealing with the Terror, war, victory and the tragic postwar years break new ground. Stalin's political and private life, his relationships with his immediate circle, his family and the 'Soviet people,' his intellectual capacities and his way of leading the country, as well as his cruelty and the system of power he built, come vividly to life, and one leaves the book with a much more profound understanding of some of Europe's darkest decades."

•Andrea Graziosi, author of the *Histoire de l'URSS*"Oleg Khlevniuk, master of the Russian archives, provides a fresh and acute analysis of Stalin the destroyer to confound revisionists who portray him as a state builder and modernizer."

•Alfred J. Rieber, author of *Stalin and the Struggle for Eurasia*"Khlevniuk is one of the most knowledgeable historians of Stalin and his era. This excellent biography of Stalin represents the current state of scholarship, and should be read widely."

•Hiroaki Kuromiya, author of *Stalin: Profiles in Power*"A superb account by the eminent scholar who pioneered the opening of the Soviet archives. Oleg Khlevniuk summarizes a lifetime of research, eschewing unsubstantiated anecdotes and tales and sticking to the documentary record, to produce an authoritative narrative of Stalin's life and times."

•Paul Gregory, Hoover Institution"Enthralling, brilliant, and groundbreaking, this book confirms Khlevniuk as probably the greatest living expert on Stalin. The culmination of his revelatory archivally-researched works that were the first to understand Stalin

as a politician, the book reveals him as a fanatical Marxist and Russian statesman— of— exceptional but flawed complexity— formed above all by his political life and the idiosyncratic realities of Soviet power. Essential reading."— •Simon Sebag Montefiore, author of *Stalin: the— Court of the Red Tsar*

Why do we need another biography of Stalin? Rarely have so many new sources of information become available within a short period as with the opening of the Stalin-era Soviet archives. I saw it as my task to weave the most salient new information into a narrative that rests entirely on what we know for certain about Stalin and his time. — Was Stalin necessary? Decades ago the British historian Alec Nove asked, "Was Stalin really necessary?" Everyone knows what a brutal murderer Stalin was, but many believe that "the trains ran on time." The evidence, however, points to catastrophic mismanagement. Nothing in Stalin's background qualified him to take dictatorial control of a vast country, reorganize its agriculture, or serve as its chief military strategist. To the end, he remained willfully blind to the fact that he had built an unworkable system. — You have been among the first to explore Stalin's personal archive. What discovery from this collection most surprised you?— It is interesting that Stalin kept the coerced confessions of the Old Bolsheviks whom he condemned to death. He, of course, knew they were innocent, but for some reason he needed these confessions. Maybe he felt they would justify his actions to posterity? — Beside the lost lives, what, for you, is the greatest tragedy of the Stalinist legacy? I am frightened that so many of our fellow Russians proclaim the Stalinist period to represent the pinnacle of the country's achievement and that we should use Stalinist methods to return Russia to glory. They refuse to see the horrible price paid. Stalin's admirers regard human life as expendable— the needs of the state come first— and are eager to hunt down twenty-first century "enemies." This totalitarian mindset is Stalin's most terrifying legacy. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read the book through and through and I will give it 5 stars. The most memorable part for me. And it's well known Stalin was a general tyrant. That when Israel started pointing more towards the US Stalin started to not like Molotov's wife's friendship with the Israeli ambassador. So Stalin had his wife fired from her high end government job then told Molotov to divorce her and then she was sent to prison. And Molotov was one of Stalin's closest relationships! After Stalin died Lavrenty Beria went to the prison and got Molotov's wife. When they reunited she asked "How is Comrad Stalin" they told her that Stalin died of a stroke. She then fainted! Probably not out of happiness but an insane level

of loyalty to the man that put her in prison. Hopefully I wrote that accurately. Another part of the book that I found interesting is how quickly after his death they reversed his decisions, released prisoners, and returned a lot of the wealth to the countryside where Stalin historically plundered the resources for a lot of his grand projects.

It is a major rehash of Stalin's years in office except for one major point.... Stalin's actions in the 1930 decade while abhorrent to most people may have been driven by information he had that the population was close to a counter revolution. Also the purge of the Army in the late 1930s was focused in large part in the new armored corps officer Corp many of whom were trained in Germany. I read this in another book about the tank warfare in 1941 on the Eastern Front. Also another interesting point is that the Russian Army was concentrated right up on the border... No defense in depth. Maybe an offensive against Germany was planned?? Maybe as more documents are declassified in Russia..... Yes many are still to be declassified.... Will lead to greater insight.

Evil is endlessly fascinating. Explaining and contextualizing it preoccupies legions of theologians and historians. Two of the worst of the bad bunch inflicted themselves on millions of hapless people in the near-term past: Hitler and Stalin. These two seem to be the epitomes of ruthless and rationalized mass murder and their acolytes are still active and, in some cases, gaining traction. Shortly after the demise of the USSR, ripples of nostalgia for Comrade Stalin and the earth-shaking power of the "Evil Empire" have, under Putin, become small waves. So, this is a source of concern for many who worry that "history repeats itself" and they'd best "know the enemy" by reading about him. Likely, there's no better starting point than Khlevniuk's brief biography. The space between heavy academic tomes and fluffy overviews of historical figures oftentimes isn't too big. In the case of Stalin, there are plenty of both the former and the latter generally aren't worth bothering to read. Historical novels convey some useful impressions, but the fictionalized aspects tend to be judgemental or sensational or simple fantasy. The real beauty of Khlevniuk's work is its brevity. As the author acknowledges in the informative introductory section, many editorial decisions were required on what to include, what to omit and how much detail to provide. He seems to have found the perfect balance. The author employs an interesting structure, using the framework of Stalin's death in 1953 as the touch-point for the narrative. Stalin's life and career unfold in detail but Khlevniuk avoids the pitfall of psychological analysis ("Why did Stalin turn out that way?") because that crucial question can never really be answered any more than a categorical explanation of "Why did Hitler turn out that way?" can be found. There were certain influences and contemporary events

for context, but there were others in similar circumstances that didn't "turn out that way", too. Stalin's legacy is thoroughly polluted by his crimes, but what of his accomplishments? He did rocket the near-feudal Russia of the tsars into the ranks of advanced industrialized countries in a very short time span. He created one of the most sophisticated and accomplished militaries in the world and expanded the Empire to cover a significant part of Europe and Asia. His ideology attracted sympathizers worldwide. He beat the Nazi war machine into dust. However, the accompanying crimes, the needless and grotesque waste of human lives and profligate squandering of resources coupled with the totalitarian police state he helmed tarnish all these accomplishments, as Khlevniuk carefully documents. One cannot detract from Stalin's brilliance as a dictator. He eliminated all rivals (real and imagined) and cemented his hold to the point where even his most trusted acolytes cowered at his death bed. More dubious were his skills as a military leader. Initially, Stalin handicapped the Red Army by destroying its founder (Trotsky), decapitating its leadership, decimating its ranks of experienced soldiers and ignoring capable professional advice. Thus, the debacle of the Nazi invasion was amplified by his incompetence (previously demonstrated during the Civil War), his arrogance and his loss of equilibrium in face of the Wehrmacht onslaught added to the disaster. Yet, as the war progressed, the soon-to-be Marshal of the Soviet Union gained confidence, experience and understanding...though he did not let up on his murderous proclivities visited on his own people: internal exile, deportations, arrests for captured soldiers, death for those who retreated and so on. As to Stalin's legacy, it's not a good one for his comrades (only Kaganovitch lived to see the near demise of the Bolshevik enterprise), his people or the subjugated nations. Maybe, like Mao, techniques like those used in Russia were needed to create the modern USSR. Maybe not, but this book helps the open-minded reader with the knowledge and context needed to establish his/her own judgement on the matter. Koba (as he was known to his closest comrades) remained King until the end. This is the "Goldilocks" of biographies: not too long, not too short...just right! I doubt there is a better balanced and more trenchantly presented biography of Comrade Marshal Stalin than this one.

I did not know much about Stalin before reading this well put together biography. The book is ordered and written in such a way that one can read from beginning to end straight through or start from any chapter. The author states his desire to present the biography as a "Russian nesting doll," and he does just that. I now have a better understanding of the life of Stalin as well as the lives of the Russian people during the Stalinist era.

I wanted to know the historic facts of this important period in the history of the Russia and the world. Whatever my American friends say ( I am French), I think the ""revolutionaries""of today inherited a class conscience, a socialist purity, although Stalin was really extreme. He was a monster. I personally think Putin has not given up the USSR empire. He never gave up Ukraine, etc... It is important to know about the facts of the Russian Revolution.

A very sober and realistic description of Stalin and how he shaped soviet society. The fact that it is written by a Russian makes the sheer brutal tragedy of Stalinism real. Written after extensive archival documents have become archival it is interesting to read well researched probable truths about several Stalin myths e.g. Was a ever a double agent, did he think he was being deposed after his near collapse after the German attack etc.

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