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# Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator

By Oleg V. Khlevniuk

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**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 *vozhd* 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.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Authoritative, fluently written. . . . The pinnacle of current scholarship on its subject."—Charlotte Hobson, *Spectator*  
(Charlotte Hobson *Spectator* 2015-05-23)

"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*  
(Andrea Graziosi)

"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*  
(Alfred J. Rieber)

"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*  
(Hiroaki Kuromiya)

"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  
(Paul Gregory)

"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*  
(Simon Sebag Montefiore)

"Oleg Khlevniuk makes the modest claim that this is a biography of Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union for thirty years. In fact, Khlevniuk has given us not just a biography of Stalin, but a history of the ruling system that Stalin created, and he does so in six concise chapters. Khlevniuk writes with clarity and insight, following the evolution of Stalin from young revolutionary, to undisputed dictator, and finally to ruthless despot, alone and dying as his subordinates cower and hope for the end. The translation by Nora Favorov is excellent, and makes the book easily accessible to English reading audiences. Khlevniuk's biography of

Stalin is a deft achievement."—David Shearer, author of *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Social Order and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953*

(David Shearer)

"Oleg Khlevniuk's biography adds greatly to our understanding of Stalin by making extensive and careful use of newly available archives to throw new light on Stalin's rule. His clear-eyed analysis draws a sharp distinction between what we know from serious research and what we should discard as mere speculation. The result is an unvarnished account that warns against nostalgia for Stalin's rule."—David Holloway, author of *Stalin and the Bomb*

(David Holloway)

"In this excellent book, Oleg Khlevniuk answers questions that have engaged historians, puzzled political scientists, and fascinated casual observers for decades. How did Stalin rise from a minor revolutionary to one of the most powerful men in history? How did he manage to first defeat contenders within the Soviet leadership, then to subordinate the Communist Party and the Red Army to his personal authority, to eventually build an empire whose specter haunts Eastern Europe to the present day? And crucially, why didn't anyone stop him before it was too late?"—Milan Svoblik, author of *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Milan Svoblik)

"Khlevniuk manages to take us into the inner sanctum of the dictator's power and show how he ruled his subordinates—indeed the whole country—through the knout and the ginger cookie, the Russian version of carrot and stick. A masterly portrait drawn by a master historian."—Ronald Grigor Suny, author of *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*

(Ronald Grigor Suny)

"No one in the world knows the inner workings of Soviet power in Stalin's time better than Oleg Khlevniuk. Beautifully and artfully composed, deeply moral, and supremely readable, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* will become the benchmark against which all future biographies of Stalin will be measured. A masterpiece."—Jan Plamper, author of *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power*

(Jan Plamper)

"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* magazine

(Paul E. Richardson *Russian Life* magazine)

"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. Favorov's masterful translation from the Russian preserves the book's spare, penetrating prose." Robert Legvold, *Foreign Affairs*

(Robert Legvold *Foreign Affairs*)

Won the 2016 PROSE Award in Biography & Autobiography. The Prose Awards recognize the very best in professional and scholarly publishing. Presented by the Professional Scholarly Publishing (PSP) Division of the Association of American Publishers (AAP)

(Award PROSE 2016-02-08)

Awarded second prize for the Pushkin House Russian Book Prize for the Best Russian book in translation.

(Pushkin House Russian Book Prize *Pushkin House* 2016-05-03)

From the Author

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.

About the Author

**Oleg V. Khlevniuk** is a leading research fellow at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences and senior research fellow at the State Archive of the Russian Federation. His previous Yale books include *The History of the Gulag*, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle*, and several collections of Stalin's correspondence.

## Users Review

**From reader reviews:**

**Thomas Smith:**

Have you spare time for any day? What do you do when you have a lot more or little spare time? Yep, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or even read a book eligible Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You recognize beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you

have various other opinion?

**Steve Pratt:**

A lot of people always spent their free time to vacation or maybe go to the outside with them household or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, as well as playing video games all day long. If you would like try to find a new activity honestly, that is look different you can read a book. It is really fun for yourself. If you enjoy the book that you simply read you can spent all day long to reading a book. The book Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator it doesn't matter what good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to develop this book you can buy the actual e-book. You can m0ore effortlessly to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not to fund but this book has high quality.

**Nancy Jones:**

In this time globalization it is important to someone to find information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The health of the world makes the information better to share. You can find a lot of referrals to get information example: internet, newspaper, book, and soon. You will observe that now, a lot of publisher that will print many kinds of book. Typically the book that recommended to you personally is Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator this publication consist a lot of the information with the condition of this world now. That book was represented so why is the world has grown up. The words styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. The particular writer made some exploration when he makes this book. Here is why this book ideal all of you.

**Roger Moxley:**

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