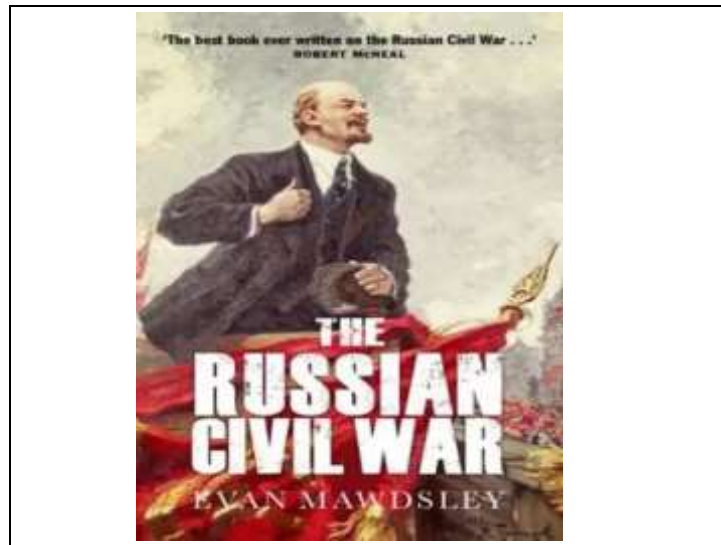


The Russian Civil War

1918 - 1921

Slide



The Russian Civil War (1918-21) was fought to decide who should control Russia in the wake of the October 1917 revolution, and it is estimated that some 8 million people lost their lives during this bitter conflict.

The civil war occurred because after November 1917, many Russians remained opposed to Lenin's Bolsheviks while others were hostile to the harsh terms the new government had delivered to the Russian nation via the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.

In an empire that geographically encompassed a large proportion of the globe, Russia's Civil War was widespread and pervasive as it involved many different political and military groups, nationalist movements and all classes of Russian society.

Several foreign nations, most of whom opposed Bolshevik government in Russia, also contributed troops, weapons, supplies and intelligence to warring parties.

Like most other devastating conflicts the Russian Civil War produced confusion, division, ill-feeling, attack and retaliation, intense propaganda, war crimes and human suffering on catastrophic levels.

During this period a conglomerate of anti-Bolshevik groups, dubbed the **Whites**, fought to remove the Bolsheviks from power and restore some elements of the old order. Other groups not directly aligned with the Bolsheviks or the Whites fought for independence or control of their own regions.

In response, by 1918 numerous anti-communist groups quickly formed throughout the former Russian Empire.

Among those opposed to the Bolsheviks were former aristocrats, nobles, large land owners and militarists who wanted a return of the Czar and the Romanov dynasty, and these disparate forces formed a 'White' army to oppose and overthrow the Soviets' control of Russia. Collectively, this disparate group were known as the **Whites** while the Bolsheviks were known as the **Reds**.

Slide



Notes

As the above map illustrates, at the end of 1917, the Bolsheviks only effectively controlled Petrograd, Moscow and the territory between both cities.

It also shows that the Whites were strongest in the most parts of the vast Russian empire, and for a time they controlled the bulk of the land — though much of the territory they held was sparsely populated.

Basically, the locations of four 'White' armies can be identified as operating in different parts of the country, separated from each other by hundreds of kilometres, thereby making communications and military co-ordination between them extremely difficult.

However the map disguises a number of other problems within the White armies that went much deeper than that.

First,

While the Whites were large in number, upon deeper analysis they could be seen to consist of a mere loose coalition of individuals and groups that formed in different parts of the country. They variously consisted of monarchists, nationalists, liberals, non Bolshevik socialists, bands of Cossacks, anarchists and out and out brigands, **who shared a common hatred for the Bolsheviks.**

The fact was that these groups shared very few values or objectives, other than their opposition to the Bolsheviks and their determination to overthrow their Soviet regime. In some cases they detested other White sub groups as much as they did the Bolsheviks! Most White leaders were nationalist and imperialist: they wanted to retain the Russian Empire and restore it to a position of strength in Europe and Asia. Beyond that, however, they had little in common politically. Some wanted the tsar restored; some wanted a constitutional monarchy; some wanted a republic; some had no views on the matter. They had no vision of what a future Russia would be like, no system of government in mind, no agreed foreign policy, and no social and land reform policies.

More critically, in the short term, they had no agreed single leader or leadership group to co-ordinate and organise their military, social and economic activities.



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The second problem for the Whites was that they had an appalling reputation regarding their treatment of the local people in the areas they controlled.

As much of this land was agricultural, the largely peasant populations who lived there were the very people Lenin had promised to give land to.

Whites expressing a desire to turn the clock back and return to the 'old days' of virtual serfdom did little to endear their cause to the local peasants.

In other words, many of the peasants who nominally resided in White territory would actually have been natural supporters of the Bolsheviks land reform policies.

In dealing with these people White commander Kornilov is reputed to have said that *"The greater the terror, the greater our victories"*.

Furthermore, he demanded that the objectives of his army must be fulfilled, even if it was necessary *"to set fire to half the country and shed the blood of three-fourths of all Russians."*

As a result of such policies mass killings occurred in 1918 in many territories under White occupation, and thousands of captured prisoners were routinely executed.

Another White leader Deniken had a particular bent against Russia's substantial Jewish population, and an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Jews in Ukraine and southern Russia were killed in pogroms perpetrated by his forces.

In the Don region it was claimed that more than 45,000 people were shot or hanged by Krasnov's White Cossack troops.

It is obvious in hindsight that by employing such extreme policies, the Whites basically failed to even get to first base in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the general Russian populace.



Notes

The third problem for the Whites related to their diplomatic skills.

Being politically incompetent and diplomatically naïve the conservative leaders of the Whites also alienated those who would and should have been their *natural allies*.

Significant former Russian vassal states such as Finland, the Baltic states, Poland and the Ukraine would all have thrown their weight behind the anti-Bolshevik cause, *if only the Whites would recognise their aspirations for independence*.

In this regard however, the Whites were pig-headed, and refused to even consider giving up as much as an inch of the motherland - and by so doing turned potential allies into enemies.

Reflections



- **Identify FOUR problems that White armies faced in the Russian Civil War**
- **What one thing did the Whites share in common?**
- **What were some of the issues that divided the Whites?**

Foreign Intervention in the Russian Civil War



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Vignette - The Czech Legion



Ironically the catalyst for the outbreak of the Russian civil war was an uprising by the Czech Legion.

The Czech Legion was a 'special' Russian Imperial Army unit, comprised of Czech & Slovak prisoners-of-war captured from the Austrian army, who subsequently volunteered to join the Russian army for the remainder of the Great War to fight against their former German allies in an attempt to defend their homeland.

After the 1917 February Revolution these men joined the ranks of Kerensky in support of a continuation of the War, and it was this unit that won Kerensky's initial successes in the civil war.

In May of 1918 the Legion was located along the Trans-Siberian Railway where it found itself stranded and unable to move, due to transport shortages and Bolshevik red tape.



Tensions between Czech Legion soldiers and Bolshevik officials began to escalate. To end the impasse, Leon Trotsky gave them his permission to travel through Russia to the Western Front so that they could continue their campaign against the Germans.

The one proviso was that the Czechs had to leave their weapons behind.

However, as soon as the first units of the Czechs surrendered their weapons, they were immediately shot down by nearby Red Guards.

This would prove to be a costly mistake for the Bolsheviks, as the response of the remaining Czech Legion soldiers was to distrust Trotsky and his promises.

On May 14th the Legion began to rebel, killing several Bolsheviks and seizing control of Chelyabinsk, a town not far south of Ekaterinburg, where the former tsar and his family were being held.

The Czech Legion was made up of seasoned soldiers with considerable fighting experience. They captured the strategic city of Simbirsk and between May 1918 and August 1918, captured so much territory that they controlled the Trans-Siberian railway from Simbirsk to Vladivostok.

The Romanov Family



Ironically the success of the Czech Legion probably sealed the fate of the unfortunate royal family.

The Tsar and his family had been sent by Kerensky to Tobolsk in Siberia where they were placed under house arrest.

However as the Czechs came within close enough proximity to threaten Tobolsk, the Romanov family was brought back to Ekaterinburg where they were confined in the Ipatiev Villa.

Itpatiev Villa at Ekateringburg



However, soon after their arrival, the Whites also threatened this city.

Lenin, recognising that while the royal family was alive, their very existence would inspire and provide an ongoing rallying point for White supporters.

Therefore, to eliminate this possibility Lenin ordered their execution.

This was carried out by select Red Army soldiers in a small villa at Ekateringburg on July 16th, 1918.

The photos in this slide shows the Itpatiev Villa in which the Tsar and his family were executed.

Reasons why the Red Army Won the Civil War



In contrast to White forces, the Red Army, with some five million soldiers at its peak, was strongly disciplined and highly co-ordinated under the direction of the Bolshevik's War Commissar Leon Trotsky.

The Bolsheviks and Soviets also maintained control of Russia's industrial heartland, most of its major cities and its significant railways; this gave them access to infrastructure, communications and interior supply lines.

The Bolshevik propaganda campaign was also more successful, promoting a White victory as a return to the 'old Russia' – a prospect that horrified many working-class Russians. The Whites failed to win sufficient support from the Russian people and could not present themselves as a viable alternative to the Soviet regime.



In Russia's hard fought Civil War, the two warring protagonists were widely scattered and forced to fight a highly 'mobile' campaign against each other across many parts of Russia's expansive geography.

In a wide ranging conflict that had no fixed fronts, where neither side had knowledge of when or where their enemy would next appear, superior transport logistics and mobility were key factors for ensuring victory.

This map shows Russia's railway networks at that time, and illustrates the fact that much of the territory occupied by the Bolsheviks overlaid the most critical areas of that nation's rail system, and in particular the key junctions and population centres of St Petersburg and Moscow.

With the enormous advantage of an 'interior' transport supply line, the Red Army was able to utilize the national rail infrastructure network to quickly move and supply reinforcements, ammunition and food to its armies on any front, as required.

Armoured Trains

ARMORED TRAIN



With their self contained and compact combination of armour, artillery and machine-guns, speed and combat readiness, the *bronepoezd*, or **military train**, was an additional and powerful new and highly mobile weapon that was extensively utilized by both sides in the Russian civil war, and was especially suited to that country's broad geographical expanses.

Armoured Trains



As with other complex equipment inherited from the Tsarist army, the Bolsheviks initially deployed armoured trains without much tactical thought, and they often were simply thrown into the thick of battle.

But as the Bolsheviks gained fighting experience they learned how best to use these mighty “land cruisers” in conjunction with the Russian rail network.

During the defence of Tsaritsyn (modern-day Volgograd) in 1918, some fifteen Red Army armoured trains were deployed en masse along several railway lines, with great effect.



Opposing the White armies was the Red Army, which enjoyed three significant advantages over their protagonists.

First, the Red army had internal (interior) connected lines of communication and supply, centred on Moscow, which meant they could quickly move troops by rail from one front to another as needed.

Second, despite their own brutality the Bolsheviks had the compliance, if not the enthusiastic support, of most of the population. As with the Whites, the Red armies in the civil war also committed many atrocities against civilian populations.

The Bolsheviks imposed an iron grip on territory under their control, and the Cheka (secret police) (which was to change its title to the NKVD) was ruthless in hunting out possible opponents to Lenin. In many areas of Russia, where the Bolsheviks had control, the NKVD was judge, jury and executioner.

Trotsky was also not fighting a cohesive unit. The Whites were made up of many groups – groups that hated each other as much as they hated the Reds. Effectively using a divide and conquer stratagem the Red Army was able to pick off opposing White Army units and defeat them one by one.

Finally, whereas the Bolsheviks promised land reform and a new social order, the Whites merely offered nothing more than a return to the old regime.

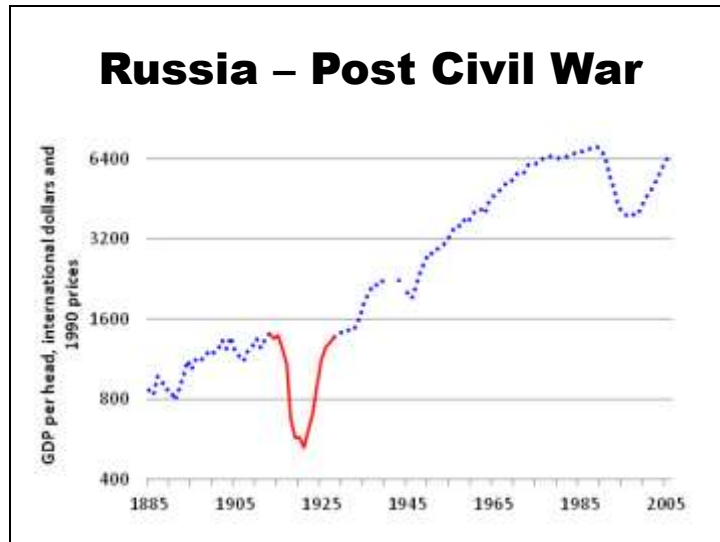
Third, they had a centralised command and communication system under the organisational genius of Leon Trotsky.

But Allied support wasn't enough to help the White Army defeat the Soviet Red Army in battle. After making gains in 1918, the Whites were driven into retreat in 1919

After success against forces in Russia itself, Trotsky then faced a challenge from Poland. Granted her independence in 1918, Poland invaded the Ukraine in 1920.

However, the Polish army was not able to defeat Trotsky's Red Army and it broke through the Poles lines and advanced on Warsaw. Jozef Pilsudski, Poland's commander-in-chief, led a counter-attack against the Red Army and Lenin decided to cut his losses and agreed to the Treaty of Riga on March 18th 1921. As a result of this treaty, about 10 million Ukrainians and White Russians were put under Polish rule.

The Treaty of Riga brought the Russian Civil War to an end. Within Russia, the Communist government under Lenin was now secure, and on 30 December 1922, the USSR was formally created – but it took another two years for the Soviets to consolidate their control over the vast territory they would dominate for the next 70 years.



The two years of Civil War following on from the Revolutions of 1917 was a catastrophic period for the Russian economy and its people.

To give this comment some substance, the Russian economy under the Tsar in 1913 was significantly less industrially developed than those of Germany, France and Britain, which meant that ordinary Russians at that time enjoyed only a very basic standard of living compared to those of their equivalents in those other European nations.

By 1922 however the Russian economy had been subjected to the sequential impacts of the Great War and two Revolutions followed by a catastrophic civil war. This meant ordinary Russians in the early 1920s then experienced a standard of living less than half of that basic level they had enjoyed just a decade before – in other words, at a level that we can only find today in the poorest countries of the world.

Worse was to come. After a run of disastrous harvests, famine conditions began to appear in the summer of 1920. Spreading hunger coincided with a wave of deaths from typhus, typhoid, dysentery and cholera.

In 1921, the grain harvest collapsed further, particularly in the southern and eastern grain-farming regions. More than five million people may have died prematurely at this time from hunger and disease.

During this war, the government of the Soviet Union could somehow manage the country. In March 1921, four months after the defeat of the White Army in the Crimea, the Lenin administration abandoned the policy of War Communism and instead formulated the New Economic Policy which allowed denationalisation (private ownership) of sections of agriculture and industry.

As the above graph indicates, it took until 1928 (under Stalin's administration) for Russian agricultural and industrial production to return to their pre-war levels.

The Russian Civil War Refugee Crisis



White Russian refugees gathering at a Crimean port during the Russian Civil War.

“Never in the history of Europe has a political cataclysm torn such huge numbers of people from their mother country and from their homes”.

These words, written by Russian émigré journalist and politician Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams in December 1921.

In addition to the internal misery created by the Russian, it is perhaps less well known that the conflict led to the displacement of refugees numbering between 900,00 and 2 million people.

While these emigres spanned all classes of Russian society, a significant proportion were former nobles, prosperous entrepreneurs, merchants, various professionals and intellectuals as well as former tsarist soldiers and officers, Cossacks, dispossessed businessmen and landowners, as well as ex-officials of the Russian Imperial government.

The majority of these unfortunates sympathised with the Whites, and due to their political affiliation and the effects of war and famine, they chose, or were forced, to flee their homes. These refugees subsequently resettled in many countries around the globe, including Australia.

While the comment made by Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams may have been accurate at that time and remained so up until the refugee crisis in Europe following the second world war, it would subsequently pale in comparison to the refugee numbers being created in conflicts around the world in the early 21st century.

Cameo – Vladimir Lenin



Lenin was one of the leading political figures and revolutionary thinkers of the 20th century, who masterminded the Bolshevik take-over of power in Russia in 1917, and was the architect and first head of the USSR.

Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov was born in Simbirsk on the Volga River on 22 April 1870 into a well-educated family. He excelled at school and went on to study law. At university, he was exposed to radical thinking, and his views were also influenced by the execution of his elder brother, a member of a revolutionary group.

Expelled from university for his radical policies he was arrested and exiled to Siberia. After his Siberian exile, Lenin - the pseudonym he adopted in 1901 - spent most of the subsequent decade and a half in western Europe, where he emerged as a prominent figure in the international revolutionary movement and became the external leader of the 'Bolshevik' faction of the Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party.

In 1917, exhausted by World War One, Russia was ripe for change. Assisted by the Germans, who hoped that he would undermine the Russian war effort, Lenin returned home and started working against the Kerensky provisional government that had overthrown the tsarist regime.

He eventually led what was soon to be known as the **October Revolution** which was followed by three years of civil war. The Bolsheviks were victorious and assumed total control of the country. During this period of revolution, war and famine, Lenin demonstrated a chilling disregard for the sufferings of his fellow countrymen and mercilessly crushed any opposition.

Although Lenin was ruthless he was also pragmatic. When his efforts to transform the Russian economy to a socialist model stalled, he introduced the **New Economic Policy**, where a measure of private enterprise was again permitted, a policy that continued for several years after his death.

In 1918, Lenin narrowly survived an assassination attempt, but was severely wounded. However his long term health was affected, and in 1922 he suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered. In his declining years, he worried about the bureaucratisation of the regime and also expressed concern over the increasing power of his eventual successor, Joseph Stalin. Lenin died on 24 January 1924.

His corpse was embalmed and placed in a mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square, where it still remains on display.

Cameo – Leon Trotsky



Leon Trotsky was a key figure in the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia, second only to Vladimir Lenin in the early stages of Soviet communist rule. But he lost out to Joseph Stalin in the power struggle that followed Lenin's death, and was assassinated while in exile.

Trotsky was born Lev Bronstein on 7 November 1879 in Yanovka, Ukraine, then part of Russia. His father was a prosperous Jewish farmer. Trotsky became involved in underground activities as a teenager. He was soon arrested, jailed and exiled to Siberia where he joined the Social Democratic Party. Eventually, he escaped Siberia and spent the majority of the next 15 years abroad, including a spell in London.

In 1903, the Social Democrats split. While Lenin assumed leadership of the 'Bolshevik' (majority) faction, Trotsky became a member of the 'Menshevik' (minority) faction and developed his theory of 'permanent revolution'.

After the outbreak of revolution in Petrograd in February 1917, Trotsky made his way back to Russia. Despite previous disagreements with Lenin, Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks and played a decisive role in the communist take-over of power in the October Revolution.

In November 1917, Kerensky's Provisional Government was overthrown and the Soviet Council of People's Commissars was formed, with Vladimir Lenin elected chairman. Leon Trotsky's first role in the new government was to serve as Commissar for Foreign Affairs, charged with making peace with the Germans. Talks began in January 1918, and Germany had a long list of demands for territory and reparations.

Trotsky strung the negotiations with the German government out, in hopes that it would be defeated by the Allies or suffer internal insurrection. However, Lenin felt that peace with Germany needed to be made so they could concentrate on building a communist government in Russia.

After the Bolsheviks took control of the Soviet government, Lenin ordered the formation of the Red Army and appointed Leon Trotsky as its leader in the new position of War Commissar.

The army's first orders were to neutralize the White Army opposed to Bolshevik control in what turned out to be the Russian Civil War. Trotsky proved to be an outstanding military leader, as he led the Red Army to victory. The task was difficult, as Trotsky directed a war effort that was at times on 16 different fronts.

It also didn't help that some members of the Soviet leadership, including Lenin, became involved in military strategy, redirecting the Red Army's efforts and countermanding some of Trotsky's orders.

Much credit for winning the Russian Civil War must go to Trotsky who, despite the criticism aimed at him over the Czech Legion issue, proved to be a brilliant War Commissar.

Untrained in military matters, Trotsky seemed to be a natural leader of men. His beliefs were simple. If a Red commander was successful in combat, they were promoted. If a commander failed and survived, he paid the price.

Also, Trotsky was willing to use ex-tsarist officers as he knew that they had the military experience the Red Army lacked. Ironically, though this was a successful policy, it was later held against him in his battle with Stalin for control of the party after Lenin's death.

Trotsky also knew that the first time the Red Army lost a major battle, it would spell the end of the revolution and all that the Bolsheviks had fought for. He visited the Red Army at the front in his legendary armoured train to instil into them this very simple fact.

In late 1920, the Bolsheviks finally won the Civil War, ensuring Bolshevik control of the Soviet government. After the White Army surrendered, Trotsky was elected a member of the seven man **Communist Party Central Committee**. He was clearly positioned as the Soviet Union's number-two man, next to Lenin.

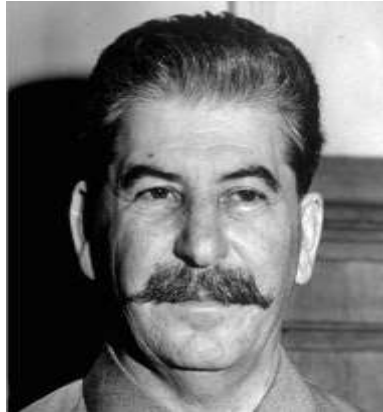
Because Trotsky considered he had played a crucial role in keeping the Bolshevik regime alive, he saw himself as Lenin's heir-apparent – however his intellectual arrogance made him few friends, and his Jewish heritage may also have worked against him.

When Lenin fell ill and died, Trotsky was outmanoeuvred by Stalin, who blamed him for the problems associated with the Czech Legion affair, and for the policy of promoting former Tsarist officers into the Red Army.

In 1927, Trotsky was thrown out of the Russian Communist Party, and subsequently exiled, first internally, followed by foreign exile. Despite this, Trotsky continued to write and to criticise Stalin.

Trotsky settled in Mexico in 1936. On 20 August 1940, an assassin called Ramon Mercader, acting on Stalin's orders, stabbed Trotsky in the head with an ice pick, fatally wounding him. He died the next day.

Joseph Stalin



Although he was never a strong orator like Vladimir Lenin or an intellectual like Leon Trotsky, Joseph Stalin excelled in the mundane operations of the revolution, calling meetings, publishing leaflets and organizing strikes and demonstrations. After escaping from exile, he was marked by the Okhranka, (the tsar's secret police) as an outlaw and continued his work in hiding, raising money through robberies, kidnappings and extortion.

In April 1917, Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin denounced the Kerensky Provisional Government, arguing that the people should rise up and take control by seizing land from the rich and factories from the industrialists. By October, the revolution was complete and the Bolsheviks were in control.

The fledgling Soviet government went through a violent period after the conclusion of the Russian Civil War , as various individuals vied for position and control.

In 1922, Stalin was appointed to the newly created office of **general secretary of the Communist Party**. Though not a significant post at the time, it gave Stalin control over all party member appointments, which allowed him to build his base. He made shrewd appointments and consolidated his power so that eventually nearly all members of the central command owed their position to him. By the time anyone realized what he had done, it was too late. Even Lenin, who was gravely ill, was helpless to regain control from Stalin.

After Lenin's death, in 1924, Stalin set out to destroy the old party leadership and take total control. At first, he had people removed from power through bureaucratic shuffling and denunciations. Many were exiled abroad to Europe and the Americas, including presumed Lenin successor Leon Trotsky. However, further paranoia set in and Stalin soon conducted a vast reign of terror, having people arrested in the night and put before spectacular show trials. Potential rivals were accused of aligning with capitalist nations, convicted of being "enemies of the people" and summarily executed. The purges eventually extended beyond the party elite to local officials suspected of counterrevolutionary activities.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Stalin reversed the Bolshevik agrarian policy by seizing land given earlier to the peasants and organizing collective farms. This essentially reduced the peasants back to serfs, as they had been during the monarchy. Stalin believed that collectivism would accelerate food production, but the peasants resented losing their land and working for the state. Millions were killed in forced labour or starved during the ensuing famine. Stalin also set in motion rapid industrialization that initially achieved huge successes, but over time cost millions of lives and vast damage to the environment. Any resistance was met with swift and lethal response; millions of people were exiled to the labour camps of the Gulag or were executed.

As war clouds rose over Europe in 1939, Stalin made a seemingly brilliant move, signing a nonaggression pact with Adolph Hitler and Nazi Germany. Stalin was convinced of Hitler's integrity and ignored warnings from his military commanders that Germany was mobilizing armies on its eastern front.

When the Nazi blitzkrieg struck in June 1941, the Soviet Army was completely unprepared and immediately suffered massive losses. Stalin was so distraught at Hitler's treachery that he hid in his office for several days. By the time Stalin regained his resolve, German armies occupied all of the Ukraine and Belarus, and its artillery surrounded Leningrad.

Stalin grew increasingly paranoid in his later years and died on 5th March 1953, at age 74, after suffering a stroke. His body was embalmed and preserved in Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow's Red Square until 1961, when it was removed and buried near the Kremlin walls as part of the de-Stalinization process initiated by Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971).

By some estimates, he was responsible for the deaths of more than 20 million people during his brutal rule.