

Joseph Stalin

Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin was the dictator of the Soviet Union from 1923 to 1953. His rule transformed the USSR from an agrarian state to major military and industrial power. But his tenure was also marked by millions of deaths as a result of his policies to transform the Soviet economy.

This article will give details about Joseph Stalin within the context of the Civil Services Examination

Early Life of Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin was born Josef Vissarionovich Djugashvili on December 18, 1878, or December 6, 1878, according to Julian calendar in the small town of Gori, Georgia, then part of the Russian empire.

Joseph earned a scholarship to attend a seminary in the nearby city of Tbilisi where he came across the works of the founder of communism ideology, Karl Marx and by extension the many revolutionary movements seeking to overthrow the rule of the Tsars in Russia. After leaving school, Stalin became involved in the Bolshevik led by Vladimir Lenin and took part in nefarious activities to fund the part such as bank robbery. He was arrested multiple times between 1902 and 1913 for his role

Rise to Power

During the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Tsarist government was toppled with the Bolsheviks coming to power in Russia, leading to the formation of the Soviet Union. Stalin, who was appointed serve on the first Central Committee of the party, began moving up the ranks until he became secretary-general in 1922. This new position allowed him to appoint those close to him in positions of power

The political base that he had created as a result allowed him to destroy all opposition during the power struggle that had resulted in the death of Lenin 1924. He would emerge as a dictator of the Soviet Union during this time period.

Dictator of the Soviet Union

The New Economic Policy of 1921 (NEP) introduced by Lenin, in Stalin's opinion, was insufficient to develop the Soviet economy at the pace need to stand toe-toe with the industrialised economies of Western Europe. In addition, he also felt that the NEP was too capitalist in its outlook which went against the very foundations of the Soviet state.

Beginning in the late 1920s, Joseph Stalin scrapped the NEP and launched a series of five-year plans to industrialise the agrarian Soviet economy. The plans were based on state control of the economy with an emphasis on collective farms. Farmers were forced to give up their individual holdings of lands and forced to join collective farms. Those who refused were, either executed or exiled to faraway Siberia. The enforced collectivization led to a fall in agricultural productivity leading to a famine which killed millions.

To maintain his grip on power, Stalin ruled with terror, eliminating or exiling anyone he considered a threat. To this effect, he introduced a system of forced labour camps called Gulags and extended the powers of the secret police.

It was during the 1930s when Joseph adopted the name 'Stalin' which meant 'man of steel'. He created personality cult centred around his new name, rewriting history books and official information about him as well as censoring press that did not do enough to portray him or the USSR in general in a good light.

Rule during World War II

Stalin had initiated the Great Purge in the late 1930s which effectively weakened the military by removing or executing capable officers. Thus the Soviet Union was not ready when a resurgent Germany laid the groundwork for World War II in 1939.

On the eve of the conflict, Joseph Stalin signed a non-aggression treaty with Adolf Hitler in order to buy the USSR time to prepare its forces. But the treaty was broken in June 1941 when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa - the German campaign in Russia as it was called - led to Germany making significant inroads into the heart of Russia.

The German Army was barely a few kilometres from Moscow itself when Stalin decided to stay and direct the war effort. Granted leeway by him to operate in as they saw fit, his generals the Soviet began a counteroffensive that began to turn the tide of the war in favour of the USSR. Beginning with victory at Stalingrad in February 1943, the Germans were driven out of Russia altogether at the end of the year.

As the war progressed, Stalin participated in the major Allied conferences, including those in Tehran (1943) and Yalta (1945). His iron will and deft political skills enabled him to play the loyal ally while never abandoning his vision of an expanded postwar Soviet empire.

Later life and Legacy of Joseph Stalin

Following the defeat of Germany in 1945, Stalin established soviet friendly communist governments in Eastern Europe despite his promises to hold elections in these countries, laying the foundation for the Cold War.

Closer to home, his campaign of terror against dissidents of the Soviet Union continued unabated, yet he remained paranoid regarding both real and imagined threats to his power. He would die on March 5, 1953, aged 74

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.

Although his rule killed an estimated 20 million Russian citizens, it is still argued to this day that if it were not for his authoritarian policies, the Soviet Union and by extension, Russia itself, would collapse into anarchy. Despite the nature of his rule, the Soviet Union became a key global player in the era of Cold War politics forever at odds with its arch-rival - the United States.

Though he was despised by the vast majority of the populace for his high-handedness, they were still grateful for certain changes brought during his tenure such as increased life expectancy due to improved health care and general living conditions.

Yet Stalin's necessity for Soviet Union's economic development has been questioned, with it being argued that Stalin's policies from 1928 on may have only been a limiting factor. To this day he remains a polarising figure in Russian history