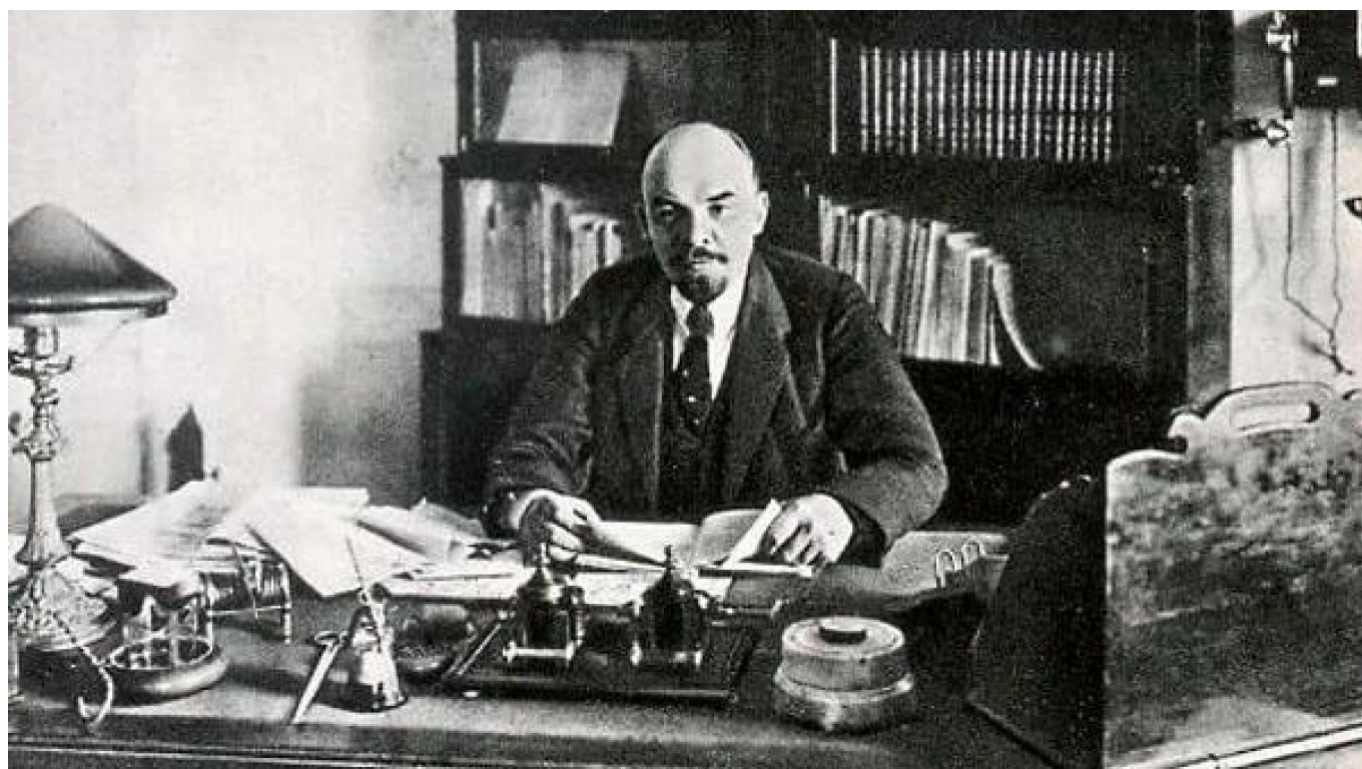


# Summer Reading: 7 New Books on Russia, Past and Present

By [Alina Safronova](#)

July 03, 2017



The centenary of the Russian Revolution has seen the publication of a host of new books evaluating Russian history over the past 100 years. [MOSENERGO-MUSEUM.RU](#)

## **The Crimean Nexus: Putin's War and the Clash of Civilizations**

*By Constantine Pleshakov*

Yale. \$28.00 (Hardcover) \$14.99 (Kindle)

A native of Yalta, in this book Constantine Pleshakov explores Russia's motivation in seizing the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in 2014. Pleshakov argues that today's Ukrainian conflict has been exacerbated by a civilizational clash between two incompatible worldviews. To the U.S. and Europe, Ukraine is a country struggling for self-determination. To Russia, Ukraine is a "sister nation," where NATO expansionism "threatens" Russia's own borders.

The picture is further complicated by the situation in Crimea itself, where the native Tatars

still retain the memories of their independence and a stand-off with Moscow that lasted three centuries, from the times of Ivan the Terrible to the rule of Catherine the Great – not to mention their deportation by Stalin during World War II. “The Crimean Nexus” provides readers with a clear, even-handed account of a major international crisis that is yet to be resolved.

### **The Last of the Tsars**

*By Robert Service*

Macmillan. \$18.37 (Hardcover) \$30.44 (Kindle)

The book follows Russia’s last tsar Nicholas II from a year before his abdication to the day he died. Robert Service, an acclaimed historian, provides quotes from the tsar’s diaries and recorded conversations to draw a portrait of the Russia’s last emperor – a difficult, unsympathetic man torn by contradictions. The author argues that a gradual transition to a more balanced constitution couldn’t have happened in Russia because of Nicholas II’s psychological complexities and autocratic beliefs.

Service specifically sheds light on the last days of the royal family, the political, economic and social environment around the Romanovs’ places of detention. He also describes the policies of the Provisional Government before it was overthrown by the Bolsheviks, who implemented an “even more radical set of revolutionary objectives.”

### **Lenin on the Train**

*By Catherine Merridale*

Metropolitan. \$23.99 (Hardcover) \$14.99 (Kindle)

Russia’s history is full of unintended consequences. But arguably no other event can surpass Germany’s miscalculation in April 1917, when it agreed to transport the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin from Zurich to Petrograd. The German High Command was hoping Lenin would start a revolution in Russia, thus helping Germany win the Great War. Yet Germany lost the war, while Lenin succeeded beyond anyone’s wildest dreams. Listed as The Times Best Book of the Year, “Lenin on the Train” draws on a vast array of sources and rare archival material, providing an exhilarating account of this fateful train ride.

### **Moscow 1956: The Silenced Spring**

*By Kathleen E. Smith*

Harvard. \$29.95 (Hardcover) \$29.95 (Kindle)

Smith builds her story around Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech,” in which the new Soviet leader denounced the crimes of Stalinism. The author gives a rigorous, month-by-month account of the events of 1956, revealing the lives of ordinary citizens, former Gulag prisoners, persecuted intellectuals, and idealistic students. Smith shows that Khrushchev’s initiatives – releasing

political prisoners and “loosening” the Iron Curtain – sparked important cultural changes in Russian society. This first liberal thaw was short-lived, but the 1956 speech, the author argues, started the chain of events that eventually led to the fall of the USSR 35 years later.

### **Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia**

*By Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton*

Routledge. \$21.95 (Hardcover) \$7.99 (Kindle)

As the title suggests, this book argues the Ukrainian crisis has left everyone worse off. This outcome has resulted from years of zero-sum behavior on the part of Russia and the West in post-Soviet Eurasia, say the authors – a rivalry that has become bitter and entrenched. Charap and Colton provide recommendations on how to move forward: All states involved must recognize that long-standing policies aimed at achieving one-sided advantage are at a dead end, and commit themselves to finding mutually acceptable alternatives through patient negotiation.

### **Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928**

*By S. A. Smith*

Oxford. \$34.95 (Hardcover) \$23.99 (Kindle)

This academic analysis provides a fresh approach toward the big questions of the 1917 Revolution: why the tsarist government’s attempt to implement political reforms after the 1905 Revolution failed and why the attempt to create a democratic system after the February Revolution of 1917 never got off the ground. Smith gives a panoramic account of the history of the Russian Empire, paying close attention to the impact of the Revolution on different social groups: peasants, workers, non-Russian nationals, the army, women, young people and the Church.

### **Spies in the Family: An American Spymaster, His Russian Crown Jewel, and the Friendship That Helped End the Cold War**

*By Eva Dillon*

HarperCollins. \$28.99 (Hardcover) \$14.99 (Kindle)

Sophisticated spycraft flourished during the Cold War, and only now are many of those stories coming to light. Eva Dillon is the daughter of a CIA spy who was active in the 1950s. In her debut she tells the story of her father and his asset—Dmitry Polyakov—a Soviet general who gave the CIA information on Soviet intelligence. Dillon crafts a moving story of friendship and betrayal that challenges ideas of black-and-white patriotism, showing the similarities between people of opposing political-economic systems.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/07/03/summer-reading-7-new-books-on-russia-past-and-pres>

ent-a58285