

A memoir by Captain Hub Grey, *Beyond the Danger Close*, presents an examination of the Canadian infantry soldier in this war. As a young officer in the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry — the first Canadian unit sent to Korea — Grey served as second in command of the battalion's mortar platoon at the Battle of Kap'young in 1951. He later served as a platoon commander in D Company until the unit returned to Canada the following year. Grey left the Army in 1953, but his exploits during his short career in battle make fascinating reading.

The central focus of Grey's book is the Battle of Kap'young. Aiming to correct virtually all previous accounts of this engagement, Grey has meticulously reconstructed its events and his role in it. More importantly perhaps, he has brought to light the valiant actions of several of his comrades in battle whose efforts were never officially recognized. Particular attention is given to a fellow subaltern, Lieutenant Mike Levy. Levy, the son of a British geologist stationed at Shanghai, was taken prisoner by the Japanese in 1942 at age 16. He and four others escaped through occupied China to Kunming in 1944, and he hitched a flight to India. Conversant in Chinese and already demonstrating considerable talent, the 18-year-old Levy immediately joined the British Army and was commissioned as a Captain in Special Operations Executive (SOE) Force 136, where he later earned a Mention in Dispatches. While serving with the Patricia's at Kap'young, Levy, now a lieutenant, demonstrated the same personal bravery and courage in leading his men in battle, and single-handedly beat off wave after wave of Chinese attackers. What makes Grey's story about Levy so remarkable is that, prior to publication of this book, little if anything was known about this remarkable man. It makes one wonder how many other unknown heroes there are.

Grey also details another morbidly interesting event — the possibility that he may have stumbled across evidence of the use of chemical or biological agents against Chinese soldiers. In a chilling account, he describes how, during a patrol, he and his men came across a group of heavily-armed Chinese soldiers, all sitting on their haunches almost in a parade formation, perfectly still, and, upon closer inspection, perfectly dead. As the dead Chinese troops showed no sign of injury, Lieutenant Grey and his soldiers were left with more questions than answers. This account alone makes the book worth reading.

Though labeled a memoir, Grey's work is much more. In addition to providing a riveting, often humorous, narrative account of his personal experiences, the book includes a wealth of relevant information, interesting facts, anecdotal stories of members of the unit, extensive supporting documentation, and perhaps the most detailed maps of the Kap'young battle produced to date. Grey is a stickler for details, as the depth of his research ably demonstrates. While its format is a bit unconventional, the book is a must read for any student of this war.

As we move past the 50th anniversary of the end of the 'shooting war' in Korea, Canadians find themselves re-fighting its battles on the pages of history. There are high expectations of the historical community: what is needed are more books like Johnston's and Watson's, supported by the unique personal accounts offered by people such as Grey. Only when all of these stories are told will the battles of the Korean War finally be over.

---

Major Andrew Godefroy is commander of the Canadian Forces Joint Space Team in Kingston, Ontario.

---

## THE DUST OF EMPIRE: THE RACE FOR MASTERY IN THE ASIAN HEARTLAND

by Karl E. Meyer

New York: PublicAffairs. 252 pages, \$37.50

Reviewed by Philippe Lagassé

---

**W**ith his ambitious *The Dust of Empire*, Karl E. Meyer aims to inform readers about two subjects: the troubled history of Central Asia and the perils of empire. The book succeeds with the first, but fails with the second. Relying on an anecdotal approach, Meyer provides lively narrative histories of Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Caucasus and the Central Asian states. Unfortunately, this same anecdotal approach is unconvincing when used to equate

the United States at the turn of the 21st century to the British Empire of the late 19th century. While comparing the two nations at the height of their power is a valuable exercise, Meyer's partisan aversion to the George W. Bush administration leads him to propose exaggerated similarities between Victorian Britain and contemporary America. As a result, *The Dust of Empire* is a work of uneven scholarly merit.

Save for the few who study or have traveled in the region, Central Asia remains a mystery to most westerners. A territorial mass inhabited by innumerable tribes speaking countless languages, the rugged lands cradled between the Persian Gulf, Russia and South East Asia are characterized by their inaccessibility. Yet, in spite of this fact, the history of Central Asia is one of continuous conquest. Empires, both indigenous and foreign, have sought to emulate Genghis Khan's seizure of

the ground connecting East and West. Inevitably, each attempt to master Central Asia shaped the lives of its inhabitants. The strength of *The Dust of Empire* is found in its exploration of these local consequences of imperial ambition.

In his case study of Iran, Meyer persuasively argues that the seeds of revolution were planted by the incessant and self-serving interventions of Britain and the United States in the affairs of Tehran throughout the 20th century. Similarly, Meyer shows how the inclinations of Britain's Indian Viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, undermined Pakistan and its predominantly Muslim population in the period leading up to partition. Continuing his exposition of imperial opportunism, Meyer then examines the turbulent relationship between Russia and the Caucasus. Having never understood Islam, both Tsarist and Communist Russians are portrayed as hapless occupiers, relying on cruelty and forced deportation to achieve a measure of compliance from their Muslim populations. Alternatively, Meyer speculates that Russia's warmer relations with Armenia and Georgia grew out of their common Christianity.

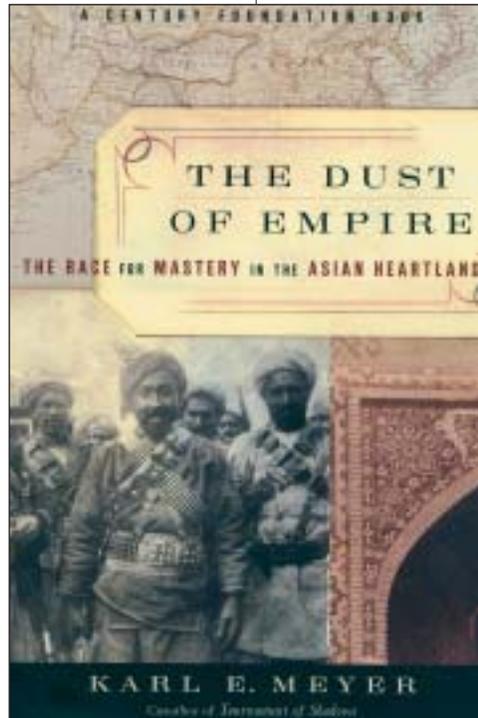
Meyer's most impressive surveys are of Afghanistan and the other 'stan' states. As experienced by both the Soviet Union and the British Empire, Afghans are skilled at deflecting imperial intrigues. Indeed, coupled with a treacherous terrain, Afghanistan's multiple ethnicities and rival chieftains make it an unmanageable country. Hence, when one reads Meyer's detailed account of the events that prompted the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan in 1979, the true daring of the decision shines through.

Taking a different tack from the rest of the book, Meyer's discussions of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan focus on the post-Cold War era. Of interest to Meyer is how these countries coped with their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. According to Meyer, the relative tranquillity the 'stans' experienced owed much to the fact that their leaders were former Soviet officials well

versed in the art of repression. These overbearing governments effectively contained ingrained ethnic and religious strife. One exception was Tajikistan, where a fierce civil war was fought in 1992 and 1993. In Meyer's estimation, the same socio-political forces that erupted in Tajikistan have the potential to do so in each of the other 'stans'. Thus, although these states are relatively calm today, they could well be consumed by violence in the near future.

Had Meyer limited *The Dust of Empire* to his histories of the states of Central Asia, he would have produced a solid text. Instead, the author chose to include a critique of American foreign policy that is both pedantic and unbecoming. Reduced to its essentials, Meyer's contention is that the United States risks overextending itself and angering the world if it unilaterally imposes its will on others. In and of itself, this argument has value.

Unfortunately, the point has been better articulated by other authors. Furthermore, it is puzzling that Meyer refers to American foreign policy as a whole in a book about Central Asia; though he does make specific references to American activities in Central Asia, both the introduction and the epilogue are diatribes against Washington's global grand strategy. Finally, a flaw exists in *The Dust of Empire's* central theme. Throughout the book, Meyer illustrates how decisions made by one generation have unintended consequences for those who come after. More precisely, Meyer wishes to impress upon his readers the notion that even well-intentioned foreign policies can bring about unexpected violence and conflict. But this begs the question: Is that not a risk inherent in most key political decisions, foreign or domestic?



In sum, *The Dust of Empire* is an informative introduction to Central Asian history which is weighed down by a bland assessment of contemporary American foreign policy.

---

Philippe Lagassé, a graduate of the War Studies Programme at Royal Military College, is a doctoral candidate at Carleton University.