



The Formless Empire: A Short History of Diplomacy and Warfare in Central Asia

Christopher Mott

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“Christopher Mott’s extremely erudite and wide-ranging examination of the history of Central Asia shows us that we have been far too narrow-minded and Eurocentric in thinking about power and how the global system changes historically. Given the current interest in ‘caliphates’ we need to reflect on the history of the areas of the world that dance to a different historical drum than we do in the West.” —Andrew John Williams, author of *France, Britain, and the United States in the Twentieth Century*

Central Asia, a vast region extending from eastern Russia and across Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and western China, has its own tradition of foreign policy rooted in the ancient nomadic culture of many of its peoples as well as the region’s distinctive geography. From the thundering hooves of Mongol or Cossack cavalry across the steppes to the clanking of tanks on parade in Moscow or Beijing, elements of this system still cast a shadow on the region at the heart of Earth’s largest continent. By tracing the evolution of Central Asian warfare and diplomacy through a series of historical examples, ranging from the ancient Xiongnu people and medieval Mongol Empire to the fall of the Soviet Union, historian Christopher Mott argues that the original system of informal relationships, indirect rule, and rapid military movement did not entirely fade from the region with the eclipse of the nomadic powers during the Middle Ages. In fact, many states like China, Iran, and Russia had already been influenced by nomadic people, and in so doing adapted their own diplomatic and military policies accordingly. *The Formless Empire: A Short History of Diplomacy and Warfare in Central Asia* is an engaging study of the nature of non-Western imperialism and great-power strategy. In addition, the book demonstrates that regional histories can show us the variety of political possibilities in the past and how they were adapted to changing circumstances—a point made even more important by the rapid changes facing global security and new forms of empire building.

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