The Russian Conquest of Central Asia: A Study in Imperial Expansion, 1814–1914. By Alexander Morrison. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xxv, 613 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Tables. Maps. $99.00, hard bound.
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Before 1991, linguistic challenges and lack of access made the conquest of Central Asia one of Russian imperialism's least understood dimensions. Alexander Morrison's *The Russian Conquest of Central Asia* epitomizes how the Central Asian field has changed. Morrison has worked in archives throughout the region and with multiple local languages. The result is an authoritative military and diplomatic history of Russian expansion to the south and east.

Morrison rejects existing interpretations of the empire's expansion in Central Asia. He convincingly dismisses the notion that Russian expansion resulted from its rivalry with Britain or was driven by the desire to develop cotton production. He also limits the importance of the disobedient "men on the spot" to a few specific moments in the conquest. Rather, he argues, the conquest of Central Asia began with a "Napoleonic generation" of imperial officers and officials who were overwhelmingly concerned with the Russian empire's status as a Great Power whose dignity Central Asian leaders could not be allowed to insult.

Rather than seeking to create "another easily disprovable grand theory," however, Morrison

describes his book as a series of "microhistories" structured in part chronologically and in part geographically (50). Each of eight core chapters addresses a major campaign that advanced the empire's southern frontier from the Ural and Irtysh Rivers in the 1820s almost 1,800 miles south by 1914. Morrison's chapters address the failed conquest of Khiva in 1839–41 and the vain effort to make the Syr-Darya line a frontier. He vividly establishes the great logistical challenges expansion involved. When the tsar's forces overcame such challenges and took Aq Masjid in 1853, they found that creating stable frontier fortresses along the Syr-Darya was nearly impossible in an area with so little water and agricultural land.

The challenges of constructing a fortified line near the Syr-Darya, in fact, accelerated Russian interest in conquering Semirechie and Tashkent, which the next two chapters examine. Morrison stresses environmental factors that enabled Russian colonial settlement in Semirechie, and highlights plans formulated in St. Petersburg to find a "natural frontier" in Central Asia using what contemporaries considered "objective criteria." This search culminated in the seizure of Tashkent in 1865. The conquest of Bukhara (1866–68) depended more on "men on the spot" than previous conquests, mostly because the telegraph did not yet connect Tashkent with St. Petersburg and because local markets and water supplies reduced logistical challenges. The conquest of Khiva (1873) was an extremely elaborate and expensive affair driven by "questions of prestige and security" (316).

The conquest of the Khoqand Khanate (1875–76) that followed was characterized by particularly lopsided victories and the unprovoked targeting of unarmed men, women, and children in "pacification" campaigns. General Mikhail Skobolev commented that, in Central Asia, "the duration of peace was in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict on the enemy" (409). The initial defeat of imperial forces in Transcaspia (1879–85) was followed by a particularly violent seizure of Gök-Tepe to restore Russian "prestige." By contrast, the annexation of Merv and delineation of a border with Britain, Afghanistan, and Persia—states with similar notions of sovereignty—was much more straightforward. Relatively easy collaboration between the British and Russian Empires also characterized the exploration and annexation of the Pamirs (1881–1905).

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Morrison states his goal as reinvigorating military and diplomatic history. He certainly does. Morrison's "microhistory" approach captures well the texture of imperialism in Central Asia and how the region's environment helped shape the empire's expansion. He conveys the experience of fighting in the tsar's army, including the soldiers' diets and the challenges of desert campaigns fought with supplies carried entirely by camels. Although Morrison acknowledges that most of his sources are in Russian, his substantial work in Central Asian languages makes him sensitive to natives' experiences of conquest and how Russian military power aggravated fissures in local societies. His careful attention to military technology helps him to explain, for instance, how Russians' use of rifled guns and better artillery allowed vastly outnumbered Russian forces to inflict many more casualties than they suffered themselves.

Throughout the book and especially in the conclusion, Morrison succinctly compares Russian conquest with nineteenth-century imperialisms around the world. His command of the material makes one wish he had ventured to produce a grand theory to rival those he debunks, since he seems particularly qualified to attempt such an explanation. This large-scale but finely textured study is too hefty to assign in any but the most specialized undergraduate courses. Nonetheless, Morrison's research and synthesis of recent scholarship on Central Asia make his book a major achievement, one that will long stand as a definitive study of its subject.

Charles Steinwedel
Northeastern Illinois University

Russian Utopia: A Century of Revolutionary Possibilities. By Mark D. Steinberg. Russian Shorts. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. xii, 138 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Figures. Maps. $17.95, paper.
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What does "utopia" mean? We probably *think* we know what it means. A vision of perfection, somewhere in the future, dreamlike and unattainable? That sounds about right. As Mark Steinberg tells us at the outset of this wonderfully thoughtful book, most of the utopian thinkers he writes about did not recognize themselves as such, because they thought utopia meant "fanciful wish having nothing to do with reality" (3). For Steinberg, however, they were utopians insofar as utopia is not actually about the fanciful or the unreal. It is instead grounded in descriptions of the really existing, it signifies a "radical rethinking" of what is possible, a "disruption of assumptions" (x). The dynamic and often taut interplay of the real and the not-yet-real is one of the themes that binds this history of Russian utopian thought. Utopia requires faith to "leap into uncertainty" (3), thereby naturally lending itself to revolution. It also involves temporal unsettling, a rejection of linear structures of time in favor of a reclaimed and rejuvenated past—or a vision of the future brought into the present. But, crucially, utopia is necessarily a critical method as well as an imagined space. It is as much about the harsh conditions that inspire it as the content of its alternative, and true utopia is never blind even to its own inadequacies. The fundamental premise of Steinberg's book is that utopia as an idea, an impulse, and a method should be taken seriously, even celebrated. Its degeneration into dystopia is not inevitable.

The four thematic chapters spiral around the meaning of utopia on "Russian" soil by exploring images of flight, dreams of a "new person," designs for a new city, and that question always looming large in Russian history—the role of the state. Flight and wings symbolize the utopian impulse to unloose the tethers of existing reality and unleash hope and freedom. Long represented in Russian culture, it was during

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