

John Kenneth Knaus, *Beyond Shangri-La: America and Tibet's Move into the Twenty-First Century*, American Encounters/Global Interactions Series, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012, foreword, illustrations, map, index, 376 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8223-5234-1 (paperback).

John Kenneth Knaus, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer and now a historian at Harvard University, trained a Tibetan guerrilla and directed the CIA's covert operations against Chinese aggressors in Tibet for seven years beginning in 1958. He wrote about the fascinating story of the CIA's engagement in Tibet from 1956 and into the early 1970s in his memoirs, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (1999).

In *Beyond Shangri-La: America and Tibet's Move into the Twenty-First Century*, Knaus has accounted what must be to date the most comprehensive and detailed history of US-Tibetan relations, starting with the 13th Dalai Lama's encounter with a US representative in 1908 and culminating with the armed resistance against the Communist Chinese 50 years later.

We follow how the Dalai Lama and his representatives met and entered into relationships with American emissaries, politicians, adventurers and devotees, and how these individuals influenced US relations with the Dalai Lama and Tibet that, according to Knaus, became characterized by a rich mix of fortuitous events and a fascinating cast of personalities. These players' views about Tibet are revealed in their reports, memoirs and communication with peers. Being one of these government agents himself, Knaus has also depended upon his own firsthand experiences and has taken advantage of his longtime involvement and friendships with Tibetans and American agents alike. Knaus adds details based upon this intimate relationship to the events over seven years and to the people who have retold their experiences to him in many interviews.

The history first unfolds through a string of remarkable meetings between individuals who turned out to be decisive to the course of US-Tibetan relations. The very first meeting that initiated official American-Tibetan contact occurred in 1908 at the historic shrine of Wutai-shan, west of Beijing. There, the ethnographer cum American diplomat to China, William Woodville Rockhill, met a dispossessed 13th Dalai Lama who (after the 'Younghusband expedition' in 1903-1904 when the British had forcibly entered Tibet) had been summoned to Beijing by the Manchu ruler. Rockhill assured the 33-year-old Dalai Lama that

Tibet had many friends abroad and that America was one of its many well-wishers, but advised the Dalai Lama to cooperate and solve Tibet's troubles within the Manchu empire.

After this initial meeting and for the next four decades, Washington was the disengaged fence sitter who accepted that the British took the lead in dealing with the Dalai Lamas and Tibet. When the British withdrew following India's independence in 1947, the US got involved and became a principal player in Tibetan affairs. The Tibetan capitulation in 1951 with the signing of the Seventeen-Point Agreement between the 14th Dalai Lama's envoys and the PRC government pushed the US into taking a more active stance. President Eisenhower initiated covert action as a tool of American foreign policy, and this also became the strategy when the US moved its anti-Communist crusade to Tibet. The elder brothers of the Dalai Lama, Takster Rinpoche and Gyalo Thondup, acted as middlemen, and the latter was instrumental in facilitating US involvement that launched a 'legacy of engagement which remains today'. Furthermore, with the cooperation of Gyalo Thondup, the CIA recruited and trained Tibetan refugees as agents to create a resistance network that sabotaged Chinese operations and dropped supplies to Tibetan insurgents, organized intelligence networks within Tibet and set up a paramilitary unit based in remote Mustang. The CIA's Tibetan Task Force arranged arms drops, two of which happened before the Dalai Lama left Lhasa in March 1959. Moreover, the CIA assisted the Dalai Lama's flight from Tibet and helped him establish a government-in-exile in India. It also trained and equipped the Special Frontier Force, a special unit of Tibetans in the Indian intelligence services.

It is especially this part of US-Tibetan relations – the American's direct and active involvement in Tibetan affairs – that I find the most interesting. Nevertheless, as is obvious from the present reading, such active engagement did not characterize the US-Tibetan relationship from 1908 until today. The CIA's meddling in Tibetan-Chinese relations and covert help is more the exception than the rule. After the CIA abandoned its engagement in Tibet, the US subsidy to the Dalai Lama was phased out. However, concurrent with the success of the Dalai Lama and his representatives in internationalizing the Tibetan cause in the 1980s, starting with the Dalai Lama's first visit to the United States in 1979, the US Congress established itself as a supporter. Examples of this support include passing bills such as the acceptance of one thousand Tibetan immigrants to the USA, providing funds for refugee assistance, negotiating UN hearings, and nominating the Dalai Lama for the Nobel

Peace Prize. Knaus also relates how US support was galvanized with the establishment of a Tibet coordinator in the State Department in 1997, and how the Dalai Lama was received in the White House by US presidents, the first time in 1991 by Bush, and more recently, by Obama.

All of this is captivating reading, but any attempt to characterize US-Tibetan relations, I believe, should not only relate the behind-the-scenes of Washington. Apart from the operational assistance in the struggle against Chinese forces in Tibet and the diplomatic assistance that was sought in Washington, the Tibetan exile movement has also cooperated with the Americans in building a democratic government-in-exile and refugee settlements in South Asia. In particular, the lack of information about what goes on behind the scenes at the Tibetan government-in-exile headquarters in Dharamsala, India, gives the impression that the course of US-Tibetan relations is dictated by the Americans. Their stories are indeed interesting, but it would be enriching if Knaus had also given a more prominent voice to the many Tibetans whom he has personally dealt with. The Dalai Lama's brother Gyalo Thondup plays, of course, a pivotal role in Knaus' account, but we learn little about his and other Tibetans' work in Dharamsala.

Nevertheless, it is certainly legitimate to focus on the US-Tibetan relationship seen from an American perspective. Although this reader has a particular interest in Dharamsala politics, Knaus' book is a welcome contribution in that it does not look at the history of Tibet as something evolving outside of and isolated from international politics, which until not long ago was the preferred narrative in dealing with Tibet. Knaus moves *beyond Shangri-La*, and his book can be recommended to anyone who is interested in Tibet's role as both a pawn and a player in international politics.

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