

Kaplan, Robert D. 2010. *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and The Future of American Power*. New York: Random House.

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In *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, Robert D. Kaplan provides a very informative investigation of the geo-political and geo-strategic context of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). In the book, the author combined his personal travel experiences throughout the region with a strong insight of its history, geography and the geopolitical developments that took place in the first decade of the twenty first century. He conducted a pragmatic analysis of the ongoing trends within and beyond the region and described in detail his central arguments that the Indian Ocean will be center stage for the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, the book questioned about the future power projection of the United States (US) and its role in this region of increasing significance, pointing out the lessons and developments throughout the region that the US take into account.

The book has 17 chapter with an introduction of broad strategic overview of the region where the emerging geopolitical context of the IOR is presented in details. Robert D. Kaplan tried to draw his readers' attention to the fact that the Indian Ocean is the central stage where the Sino-US global competition intersects Sino-Indian geostrategic competition at the regional level. Moreover, Kaplan mentioned that the US war against Islamist terrorism and its containment of revolutionary Iran are also focused within the region. Afterwards, the book takes us to a tour across the region, starting from the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, to South Asia and



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Southeast Asia, and then to India Ocean's African coasts. It has specifically dedicated chapters on Oman, Baluchistan and Sindh, Gujarat, Delhi, Bangladesh, Kolkata, Sri Lanka, Burma, Indonesia, China and Zanzibar. Every chapter has essentially followed the author's journey throughout the region. However, Kaplan was not able to address current trends inside Iran and its contemporary regional dynamics, and an explanation on the small island states in the IOR was missing. Moreover, a chapter on Australian perspective on the Indian Ocean's regional architecture would make the book richer and more inclusive.

Overall, the author reminds us the significance of the basic elements of geography such as location and configuration, as well as, historical trends in the current and emerging geopolitics and geostrategy of the Indian Ocean Region. He also extensively addressed and analyzed the political, demographic, societal, cultural, environmental and economic issues of major countries in the region. The author's findings reveal the ground realities of a dynamic and complex region with significant economic and development potential, and which also faces wide-ranging traditional and non-traditional security threats.

As it happened in the past, Kaplan mentioned that the future trajectory of the region will also going to be influenced by the decisions and statesmanship of certain individuals. He explores this human dimension, describing among others Oman's former Sultan Qabus bin Sa'id, and current Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former chief minister of Gujarat.

As far as geography is concerned, the map of the IOR was still taking shape and the book was very clear about the strategic significance and the rationale of the new port and base projects (Salalah, Gwadar, Chahbahar, Karwar, Hambantota, Kyank Phru, etc.). The author also described the ongoing hydrocarbon pipeline projects that would eventually link the resource rich landlocked regions (e.g., Central Asia) to the Indian Ocean, and the Indian Ocean to the landlocked regions (e.g., Southwestern and Northeastern China), and other pipelines would connect India with Iran and Burma with Northeast India and China. Moreover, there are also other projects offering a China a solution to the Malacca Dilemma either by a new canal through Kra Isthmus or by a land bridge in Thailand. All these projects signal the vital and growing importance of energy flows in the IOR, and the need for China and India, the two rising powers in the region, to secure their energy supply especially on the oil and gas coming from the Middle East.

On history, Kaplan explain how the monsoon has been so influential in binding an interdependent group of nations within the entire IOR, a 'globalized' region, which allowed economic and cultural exchanges from the Arabian Peninsula to the East Africa, the Indian Subcontinent and the Indonesian archipelago, and vice versa, and communication extended to the Mediterranean in the west and China in the east for more than two millenniums. This vivid cycle of economic and cultural exchange was significantly destroyed and exploited when the European colonial powers entered the Indian Ocean and competed for control of its trade routes and economic resources. After the decolonization process in the 1960s and 1970s and the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, and amidst the simultaneous resurgence of India and China, Robert

D. Kaplan believes that 'it is possible that the five-hundred-year chapter of Western predominance is slowly beginning to close' (p. xii). Although the United States and other Western powers will remain involved in the region in the near future, the relative decline of Western powers than that of the Eastern powers appears to be almost a certainty.

However, the reemergence of an Indian Ocean-centric world order is still in its initial stage and it will continue to unfold throughout the twenty-first century. Kaplan mentioned about diversified possibilities of the future IOR, having a potential for both competition and cooperation between the regional powers. Moreover, the region has wide-ranging security threats including radical nationalist movements, religious extremism, problems related to governance, inefficiency of administration, natural disasters and environmental degradation. Therefore, it is in this complex and rapidly shifting geopolitical environment that the US will have to survive and adapt to the challenges posed by the two rising powers - China and India. Kaplan also mentioned that the US needs to become a legitimate power in the region in the eyes of the billions of Muslims who reside in the Greater Indian Ocean map. Moreover, according to the author, the US should represent the balance of power in the competition between India and China in the emerging regional order of the IOR. He argues that the US power can be preserved by "seeking at every opportunity to identify its struggles with those of the larger Indian Ocean world."

The book indeed is an amazing journey into geopolitical and geostrategic realities of the Indian Ocean. Kaplan believes that the central flashpoint of the maritime world is

now the Western Pacific and Greater Indian Ocean Region and that “the Indian Ocean will be where global power dynamics will be revealed. Together with the contiguous Near East and Central Asia, it constitutes the new Great Game in geopolitics.” The ideas and predictions of Kaplan have been manifested in the newly introduced competing geopolitical and geostrategic doctrines, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, where the IOR is already at the focal point of strategic thinking. Therefore, it is very likely that the region will remain as the most strategic landscape of the world for the upcoming decades. The book guides us to travel through the region and fully appreciate the existing local, regional and global issues that intermix in this region. It gives us an overview to realize the significance of the IOR in the global geopolitics and for the future of US power at the global level.

Implications for Bangladesh

The developments described by Kaplan have important implications for Bangladesh’s role on the regional and international stage. The area that now forms the state of Bangladesh has a long history of geostrategic significance within the IOR. Due to its fertile landmass, Bengal, more specifically its eastern region which covers most of the part of Bangladesh, served as the economic powerhouse of the Mughal Empire, the empire that possessed one-fourth of the world’s GDP till the end of the 17th century. But the hundreds of years of colonial subjugation exploited the indigenous industries across the region. However, becoming the eastern wing of Pakistan in 1947 did not bring any considerable economic development of the region as the profits from the

exports of East Pakistan were mostly invested in West Pakistan's industries and infrastructural projects. Following the war of independence in 1971, it took more than two decades to bring about political stability and foster economic growth. Bangladesh has improved significantly in several indicators like education, healthcare, and child mortality rate. Therefore, Bangladesh, is now on a position to reclaim its historic geostrategic importance and, thereby, act as the commercial hub of this region.

Geographically, Bangladesh stretches between the Himalayan foothills in the north and the northern tip of Bay of Bengal in the south. The country is the only geographical real-estate to connect South Asia with South East Asia. As a result, it is at the centre of three rapidly growing economic areas of the world: China in the north, India's mainland in the west, and South East Asia to the east. This unique geostrategic location gives Bangladesh the opportunity to play the central role in any future economic, strategic and security initiative within the IOR. Thus, Bangladesh has been making the best use of its own geostrategic potential by joining both the China-led BRI and US-led FOIP strategy to foster its own infrastructural development and generate economic growth. However, as Kaplan suggested, Bangladesh needs to address several climate-induced vulnerabilities including sea level rise and natural disasters that could very adversely impact the country in the near future.