Even though the Pashtun majoritarianism has weakened over the years, restructuring a new Afghan state based on constitutionalism of liberal democratic variety has a long way to go. As Rais rightly says, it is a challenge of reconstructing a failed state, where all the vital institutions will have to created afresh; more importantly they will have to be sustained over a period of time for them to take roots. While the emerging Afghan state has to deal cautiously with the issue of social (ethnic) inclusion at social, political and constitutional levels, it will need tremendous international support to end warlordism and the political economy of drugs. The effort this time must not fail and at international and regional levels efforts will have to be made to sustain the process beyond narrow interests.

The volume is a rare study that not only offers an informed, candid, non-partisan analysis, it attempts to provide solutions too.

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Robert D. Kaplan’s book, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, comes as a delightful reading in the realm of area studies, where he takes a peek into the vast Indian Ocean rimland and seeks to explain in what ways the socio-religious, economic, political, cultural and ethnographic forces, influencing the lives of the inhabitants of this region, would make an impact in shaping global affairs in the twenty-first century. His study encapsulates an area stretching from the Horn of Africa, through the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian plateau, the Indian subcontinent, the Arakan coast, down to the Indonesian archipelago; which he refers to as the ‘Greater Indian Ocean’ region. With forces of religious extremism, political instability, sub-national struggles, piracy, environmental change, among others, plaguing this area, it becomes imperative for the US to be innovative in modifying its *Pax Americana* so as to remain a potent force in the Indian Ocean. The US has to accommodate a rising China and a resurgent India as positively balancing forces in order to maintain peace and order, for trade and commerce, in this ocean.

Robert D. Kaplan is a distinguished American journalist and author, whose writings have featured in *The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Foreign Affairs, The New York Times* etc. He has 12 previous books to his credit, some of which include *Mediterranean Winter, Eastward to Tartary, The Coming Anarchy, Balkan Ghosts* and *Warrior Politics*. Currently, he is a national correspondent for *The Atlantic* and a senior fellow at the Centre for a New American Security in Washington. He was the Class of 1960 Distinguished Professor in National Security at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis from 2006–2008. He has been appointed as a member of the Defense Policy Board, an advisory committee to the US Department of Defense, in 2009, by the then Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates.

The term ‘Monsoon’ has been used as a metaphor to analyse the present-day problems and emerging situations in the Indian Ocean region by taking recourse to a long and rich historical past, whereby successive hordes of merchants, seafarers, religious communities and refugees of socio-religious and politico-economic conflicts have intermingled for hundreds of years and contributed to the emergence of cosmopolitanism along the entire coast surrounding this vast body of water. This book has been divided into three parts having 13 chapters in total, along with a preface introducing the Eurasian rimland. It is an attempt to break free from looking at this area through the lenses of the Cold War as a Third World backyard. Instead it seeks to present it as a theatre holding immense promise for cooperation between America, on the one hand, and emerging powers like China, India, Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Australia, on the other.

China’s rise as a great power and its interests in the Indian Ocean region run as an overarching theme throughout Kaplan’s book. He draws examples from the Chinese Admiral Zheng He’s naval expeditions, in the fifteenth century AD, comprising of hundreds of ships and 30,000 men, which reflects the urge to spread the Sinic culture and influence over entire maritime Asia. These expeditions did nothing more than achieving trading agreements with other kingdoms for China; but succeeded in projecting her power as a competent force. Therefore, as Kaplan points out, the vigorous importance in Zheng He, by China, of late, ‘says, in effect, that these seas have always been part of its zone of influence’ (p. 12).

Today the principal focus of the world powers centres on ensuring and securing their vital energy supplies. Being aspirants for great-power status, China and India are concentrating increasingly on economic growth and development, which has pushed up their energy demand. Therefore, in the author’s view, they have turned their attention towards sourcing new energy routes and controlling the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) throughout the Indian Ocean region. This oceanic rimland accounts for 70 per cent of the passage of the world’s petroleum needs and one half of the global container traffic. The principal ‘navigational choke-points of world commerce—the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, Hormuz and Malacca’ lie in this region (p.7). The Indian Ocean is the arena where Sino-US and Sino-Indian rivalries may potentially flash out in the future due to the need for securing their respective national interests with respect to national security, energy security and the like.

Kaplan’s ideas somewhere remind one of John W. Garver’s (Development of China's Overland Transportation Links with Central, South-west and South Asia, The China Quarterly, 2006) observation that unlike America, China does not have the luxury of a western ocean and therefore has to develop outlets towards the Indian Ocean for the development of these resource-rich western and south-western areas and securing energy supplies for its eastern coast. The energy demand to sustain economic growth, a huge surge in trade and commerce facilitated by a booming economy, and relatively secure land borders have fuelled China’s pursuit of naval power. China’s forays into Africa and its development of ports and energy corridors in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Burma and Indonesia should be seen in this light. However, the strategic dimensions cannot be ignored as China’s growing economic and military clout, in the backdrop of waning American power, is perceived as a security threat by many countries of South and Southeast Asia. In reverse, China’s concerns about secessionist movements in its restive border regions, from Xinjiang to Taiwan, and the unwelcome meddling of America in its internal affairs need also be taken into account.

The second major theme dealt with in this book is one of Islamic radicalism which can be seen throughout the Indian Oceanic maritime region. What was once an area bound together by trade and commerce, all through history, and promoting cosmopolitanism, it is today afflicted by the scourge of
Islamic terror. Even in this local histories have to be taken into account. Kaplan has shown that whether it is in Oman, Pakistan, or even Zanzibar, the struggle has been between the haves and have-nots, compounded by bad governance and narrow sectarian approach towards regional development. Even in a strong democracy like India, the threat of militant Hindu nationalism haunts a place like its economically prosperous state of Gujarat, which witnessed a pogrom against the Muslims in 2002. Dismal living standards, bleak prospects for a better future, skewed development policies and illiteracy provide a fertile breeding ground for religious radicalism to entrench itself. This is more evident in Indonesia, where Islam has been imported into the country through merchants and seafarers, unlike the hordes of proselytising armies of the Caliphate in West and South Asia in the Middle Ages.

Gleaning through a web of rich historical literature and drawing upon the works of numerous scholars like James R. Holmes, Toshi Yoshihara, Sugata Bose, K. N. Panikkar, among others, Kaplan weaves an endearing narrative about the origins and evolution of the nature of the present-day social and political formations in all the countries, starting from Oman to Indonesia. He strives to connect all of these disparate social and political systems under the rubric of the beneficial trading system that connected the Indian Oceanic rimland, since antiquity, before the advent of the Europeans in the sixteenth century. Quoting Admiral Mike Mullen (p.292), Kaplan suggests that America needs to co-opt China and other powers like Japan, India etc. to cooperate in making this ocean safe and free for trade and commerce. This would also enable the Americans to gracefully cede their great power responsibilities to the others, without inviting any conflict. Hegemonic dominance should be replaced by indispensability as America’s long-term goal to protect its interests in this region.

Frankly speaking, Kaplan’s book comes as a well-researched treatise with a good collection of maps. His keen historical sense in trying to trace the roots of every society and polity, coupled with a lucid way of writing prose and keenness to look at this region, without any of the prevalent Western ideological biases, has made this book extremely readable to both the specialist and the uninitiated readers. His views about promoting trade cooperation among all the contenders for dominance over the Indian Ocean, drawing parallels from history of the oceanic trading communities of the Arabs, Indians, Chinese and others, can be embraced as a useful method. But the nuances of great power politics, along with the emergence of non-state forces like terrorism and piracy, are far too complex to simply calibrate a unidirectional approach to solve outstanding issues of concern between states. Trade can be one of the facilitators in creating amity. People to people contacts in the cultural and educational spheres have to be fostered. The creation of vibrant and functioning civil society institutions is necessary. But as Kaplan says, such endeavours should not be purely western imports, but rather cater to local sensibilities. It is all about initiating the right blending of ideas, both Oriental and Occidental. To conclude, Kaplan’s Monsoon is a must read for all to have a holistic as well as a comprehensive understanding of the Indian Ocean region.

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In his 13th book, Robert D. Kaplan, correspondent for The Atlantic, claims that the Indian Ocean will turn into the new center of power in global politics and the stage for the "new Great Game" where global power dynamics will be revealed. The heart of the geopolitical world map will thus no longer lie in the Atlantic Ocean, as it has for the past centuries, but shift eastwards. Kaplan thus argues that we need to adapt our traditional perspective, reflected in the design of our maps which usually puts the Western Hemisphere or Europe in the center.