

MONSOON: THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POWER¹

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[A]s China and India compete for ports and access routes along the southern Eurasian rimland, and with the future strength of the U.S. Navy uncertain, because of America's own economic travails and the diversionary cost of its land wars, it is possible that the five-hundred year chapter of Western Preponderance is slowly beginning to close.²

I. Introduction

If you build it, they will come.³ While not speaking of building a baseball diamond in a farm field, the basic premises of building and thinking big are at the heart of Robert Kaplan's *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*. Kaplan asserts that the United States must build its foreign policy in the Indian Ocean region in order to capitalize on big economic opportunities. Current U.S. foreign policy ignores the region due to the primary focus on terrorism and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴ This unfocused foreign policy is allowing other countries to capitalize on the region's economic opportunities.⁵

Kaplan posits that the countries surrounding the Greater Indian Ocean are the future frontiers of global economic development.⁶ International law attorneys, foreign policy experts, business investors,

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¹ ROBERT D. KAPLAN, *MONSOON: THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POWER* (2010).

² *Id.* at xii.

³ *FIELD OF DREAMS* (Universal 1989) (The author's adaptation of the quote, "If you build it, he will come.").

⁴ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at xii, 229, 249, 251, 270.

⁵ *Id.* at 13.

⁶ *Id.* at xi.

and anyone interested in the future economic growth of the Indian Ocean Region would be well served by reading Kaplan's latest work.

Kaplan, a national correspondent for *The Atlantic* and a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, draws from his experiences as a consultant to the U.S. Army's Special Forces, the U.S. Air Force, and the U.S. Marines when developing his argument for a foreign policy focus on the Indian Ocean region.⁷ These experiences, along with extensive research and travel,⁸ reinforce his writing and premise that the region, ignored throughout history,⁹ continues to be ignored by the United States. America must shift its obsession¹⁰ with al Qaeda and focus its policy on the new, middle classes of Asia,¹¹ using soft power.¹²

Robert D. Kaplan's work succeeds in showing how building the playing field of "the new Great Game in geopolitics" is in the Indian Ocean region "where global power dynamics will be revealed."¹³ The current U.S. game plan maintains the status quo by continuing its naval presence, which protects trade routes or "sea lines of communications"¹⁴ in the Indian Ocean and provides humanitarian assistance. America needs to refocus its foreign policy plan in order to join the power hitters of the region, India and China, as both rise to greater power.¹⁵ Unfortunately, Kaplan's work fails to address just how the United States should do this and instead only raises the difficulties in the region.¹⁶

⁷ Robert D. Kaplan—Biography, THE ATLANTIC, <http://www.theatlantic.com/robert-d-kaplan#bio> (last visited May 29, 2012).

⁸ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at xi–xiii.

⁹ *Id.* at 6 (describing how common world maps typically split the Indian Ocean region and lose the area to the edges of these maps and how Americans are barely aware of the Indian Ocean because of geography).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 229.

¹¹ *Id.* at 103, 323.

¹² JOSEPH S. NYE, JR., *SOFT POWER: THE MEANS TO SUCCESS IN WORLD POLITICS* (2004) (describing soft power as influencing others to want what you want without the use of force as persuasion). KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 290 (soft power as used by China), 183 (soft power as used by India).

¹³ *Id.* at 13 (discussing India and China becoming connected to South East Asia and the Middle East through trade, energy, and security agreements).

¹⁴ *Id.* at 283.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 9, 125, 289.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 321–23 (describing that "so many of the challenges—and hopes and dreams—of this new middle class are personal and materialistic, there will be increasing calls for better government and, yes, democracy").

II. The United States' Unfocused Foreign Policy Game Plan

Kaplan critiques the United States' foreign policy approach, arguing that it is unfocused and has long ignored the region, and has allowed China¹⁷ to be at the forefront of infrastructure development by utilizing its vertical expansion strategy.¹⁸ Using this strategy, China is drawn to the Indian Ocean where historically the monsoon was used for expansion in trade.¹⁹ Kaplan provides the reader with a lengthy history that compares old sea trade against modern trade that deals with crowded trade routes, employs high-tech ports, and seeks to protect both with a powerful navy.²⁰

As Kaplan points out, current U.S. policy may be focused elsewhere, but as the leader in the world, the United States should engage in a multi-pronged foreign policy approach and effectively join China's and India's economic and political efforts in the region. Ultimately, Kaplan's pessimistic view of American foreign policy becomes clear when he argues that the United States must make peace with billions in the region, many of them Muslim, in order for American power to be seen as wholly legitimate.²¹

Kaplan's cynicism of U.S. policy on Iraq and Afghanistan²² is misplaced since the current administration continues its efforts to strengthen ties to the Indian Ocean region.²³ Kaplan's recurrent theme is

¹⁷ *Id.* at 11.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 10 (describing the vertical strategy of China's efforts to "expand its influence vertically, that is, reaching southward down to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean") and 283 (describing how China seeks to reach the Indian Ocean in order to achieve a two-ocean strategy).

¹⁹ *Id.* at 137 (explaining the meaning of "[t]he monsoon—from the Arabic *mausim*, meaning 'season'—is one of the earth's 'greatest weather systems,' generated by the planet's very rotation, and also by climate") and xiv (describing how the monsoon allowed explorers and empires to travel the ocean using the "climatic phenomenon" of the monsoon for "trade, globalization, unity, and progress").

²⁰ *Id.* at xiv, 9–11.

²¹ *Id.* at 322.

²² *Id.* at 249 (discussing that "[t]he democracy that Bush tried to build violently in Iraq is developing peacefully in Indonesia without his help"), 251 (stating that "[i]f the first term of President George W. Bush was about the war on terrorism and the second about spreading freedom and democracy, then Indonesia is the world's best example of what Bush advocated, in the same sequence, although his administration often was too preoccupied to notice").

²³ See Sameer Jafri, *Obama's Visit to India*, Nov. 16, 2010, <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/3654.cfm> (discussing President Obama's visit to India in November 2010); *U.S.*

that America's land wars²⁴ and its economic travails²⁵ have been a distraction that delays U.S. foreign policy influence in the region. This theme of cynicism detracts from an otherwise insightful examination of the region's economic opportunities.

A. The United States' Game Plan for China

Kaplan argues that China is taking advantage of the United States' preoccupation with terrorism by capitalizing on economic opportunities available in the Region.²⁶ Economic opportunities in the form of fossil fuels²⁷ and trade of manufactured goods²⁸ have encouraged China to invest into airports,²⁹ shipping ports,³⁰ and pipelines³¹—strategic avenues that will allow China to exert influence and prosper economically from the region.³² Kaplan clearly believes that the United States needs to assert its power in order to benefit from the region.³³ Perhaps this approach is a result of “Kaplan once believ[ing] that something called ‘amoral self-interest’ should be the defining aspect of American foreign policy.”³⁴ Such an unprincipled approach to foreign policy is not the type

Sec'y of State Hillary Clinton Begins India Visit; Terror, Afghan-Pakistan, Nuclear Deal Top Agenda, ECON. TIMES, Jul. 18, 2011, 11:24 PM, http://articles.economicstimes.india.com/2011-07-18/news/29787370_1_counter-terrorism-india-visit-state-hillary-clinton (discussing Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to India on July 18, 2011); Howard LaFranchi, *Hillary Clinton: Don't Be Suspicious of US-China Relationship*, CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, Jan. 14, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Foreign-Policy/2011/0114/Hillary-Clinton-Don-t-be-suspicious-of-US-China-relationship> (discussing visit to China in January 2011).

²⁴ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at xii.

²⁵ *Id.* at xii.

²⁶ *Id.* at 277. “[A]s the Cold War recedes into the past China rises economically and politically, taking advantage, in effect, of America's military quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan, a new and more complex order is gradually emerging in the maritime rimland of Eurasia . . .”

²⁷ *Id.* at 164 (describing the future of a “natural gas alliance between India, China, Bangladesh, and Burma”).

²⁸ *Id.* at 129.

²⁹ *Id.* at 164.

³⁰ *Id.* at 10 (discussing the large port facility at the Pakistani port of Gwadar along with another port in Pasni, Pakistan as well with a highway linking the seventy-five miles between the two ports).

³¹ *Id.* at 132.

³² *Id.* at 7.

³³ *Id.* at 125–29, 237–38.

³⁴ Tom Bissell, *Euphorias of Perrier: The Case Against Robert D. Kaplan*, VA. Q. REV., Summer 2006, <http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2006/summer/bissell-euphoria-perrier/>

of policy the United States needs. Instead of seeking to benefit from the region, the United States' typical strategy is to assist the region first, and then accept any rewards of the good created. For example, the United States may assist in stabilizing a region and then accepting the economic benefits.

While skillfully describing the importance of naval domination in the region,³⁵ Kaplan relies too heavily on the idea that the United States and China are headed toward an adversarial relationship.³⁶ This type of writing mimics Kaplan's prior works, as described by David Lipsky, who "laments that Kaplan 'appears to have become someone who is too fond of war.'"³⁷ Kaplan's "future war" also has Islamic radicals supporting China³⁸ against the United States. Kaplan's work would be better served using war as the last resort approach.³⁹ Kaplan's position that the United States needs to stop China's development in the region reflects a short-sighted and unnecessary "us versus them" mentality. Such a mentality is not advantageous to the United States, China, or India.

B. The United States' Game Plan for India

Kaplan's strategy is for the United States to attain more allies in order to beat its top rival, China. In order for the United States to be able to compete with China, he argues that the United States will need to "leverage[] allies like India and Japan against China" and will have to "to gradually and elegantly cede great power responsibilities to like-minded others . . . as part of a retreat from a unipolar world."⁴⁰ Such a plan has the United States seeking to partner with India, which "can play the role

(last visited May 29, 2012) (asserting that that Kaplan once stated "the world is too vast and its problems too complicated for it to be stabilized by American authority").

³⁵ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at xi, 16, 217, 283–93.

³⁶ *Id.* at 291 (noting that China and the United States are adversaries because "both require imported energy in large amounts" and because the "philosophical systems of governance . . . [are] wide apart")

³⁷ Bissell, *supra* note 34.

³⁸ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 258 (discussing the radicals "wish[ing] China well when it clashes with the United States")

³⁹ Colin Powell, U.S. Sec'y of State, *Powell: War with Iraq Is 'Last Resort,'* CNN.COM, Oct. 9, 2002, http://articles.cnn.com/2002-10-09/politics/powell/transcript_1_assessments-rise-weapons-deputy-cia-director?_s=PM:ALLPOLITICS.

⁴⁰ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 293 ("A peaceful transition away from American unipolarity at sea toward an American-Indian-Chinese condominium of sorts would be the first of its kind.").

of the chief balancer vis-à-vis China.”⁴¹ Teaming India and the United States versus China simply should not be the focus of American foreign policy. While correct in his assertion that “India will emerge as the key ‘swing’ state in international politics,”⁴² it does not mean that the United States is currently or should in the future align itself only with India. A balanced foreign policy approach⁴³ is best.

Kaplan supports his proposal by arguing that the United States and India are alike historically.⁴⁴ He seeks to link the United States to India since “India is perhaps China’s most realistic strategic adversary.”⁴⁵ Kaplan argues the adversarial relationship exists because the region “does not have a single focal point,”⁴⁶ forcing India to gain economic advantages by horizontal expansion.⁴⁷ Such expansion ultimately puts India on a path to clash with China as each country seeks to protect sea going products and assert a presence in the region.⁴⁸ The United States should be cautious, however, so as to not team with India or China independently, but instead maintain diplomacy through a balanced foreign policy approach that develops relationships by using both public and private international law⁴⁹ principles.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 125.

⁴² *Id.* at 124.

⁴³ Daryl Press & Benjamin Valentino, *A Balanced Foreign Policy*, 2006, http://www.tobinproject.org/sites/tobinproject.org/files/assets/Make_America_Safe_Balanced_Foreign_Policy.pdf (last visited June 13, 2012).

⁴⁴ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 124 n.10 (discussing the “argu[ment] that New Delhi officials since the time of the Cold War have inculcated the precepts of George Washington’s Farewell Address of 1796: that India, like the United States, inhabits its own geographical sphere, in India’s case between the Himalayas and the wide Indian Ocean, and thus is in a position of both dominance and detachment”) (citing STEPHEN P. COHEN, *INDIA: EMERGING POWER* 55 (2001)).

⁴⁵ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 126 n.12.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 15.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 10 (“India seeks to expand its influence horizontally, reaching eastward and westward . . . parallel to the Indian Ocean.”).

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 15. “A combined naval task force, comprised of the Americans, Canadians, French, Dutch, British, Pakistanis, and Australians, patrols permanently off the Horn of Africa in an effort to deter piracy.” *Id.*

⁴⁹ INT’L & OPERATIONAL LAW DEP’T, THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL’S SCHOOL, U.S. ARMY, *LAW OF WAR DESKBOOK 1–2* (2001) [hereinafter *LAW OF WAR DESKBOOK*]. “Public international law . . . deals mainly with intergovernmental relations. Private International law is primarily concerned with the ‘foreign transactions of individuals and corporations.’” (citing MARK W. JANIS & JOHN E. NOYES, *INTERNATIONAL LAW: CASES & COMMENTARY* 2 (1997)).

III. The Best Offense is a Good Defense⁵⁰

The U.S. Navy's reign over the seas allows America to subtly influence the region without using force to overtly affect the dynamics of the region. This soft power approach has the United States "play[ing] a more modest political role" in the region. By providing security, the United States assists other countries to rise up.⁵¹ Kaplan demonstrates how this flexible policy. For example, when the tsunami afflicted Indonesia and Sri Lanka in December 2004, the United States, India, Japan, and Australia sent aid to the region without discussions with the United Nations.⁵² This type of foreign policy would more aptly rest under the theory of "smart power"⁵³ as opposed to using hard or soft power.⁵⁴ In short, being the power hitter in the world means that the United States is expected to pinch hit when needed, such as providing humanitarian intervention.⁵⁵

Kaplan uses China's efforts to build its Navy as support for his belief that the United States and China are adversaries. He argues that China is motivated by smart power, which fuels China's already existing desire for access to, and its quest for a presence in, the Indian Ocean.⁵⁶ As China builds its navy "in order to protect [its] merchant fleet across the Indian Ocean and western Pacific," China seeks to end its reliance on the protection provided by the U.S. Navy.⁵⁷ Kaplan's arguments lose

⁵⁰ William Safire, *The Best Defense*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 14, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/14/opinion/the-best-defense.html> (playing off the quote attributed to the heavyweight boxer Jack Dempsey who is believed to have said, "The best defense is a good offense") (last visited May 29, 2012).

⁵¹ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 16 (comparing the U.S. position in the Indian Ocean region with the U.S. position in Asia) (citing Greg Sheridan, *East Meets West*, NAT'L INT., Nov./Dec. 2006)).

⁵² *Id.* n.16 (discussing that the "old construct [of the United Nations] with France having a seat on the Security Council but not India" should not be confused with a world where "Asia's politicians . . . appreciate hard power") (citing James R. Holmes & Toshi Yoshihara, *China and the United States in the Indian Ocean: An Emerging Strategic Triangle?*, NAVAL WAR C. REV., Summer 2008, at 41).

⁵³ Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Sec'y of State, *American Smart Power: Diplomacy and Development Are the Vanguard*, May 4, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/scp/fs/2009/122579.htm> ("We must use what has been called smart power: the full range of tools at our disposal—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation.").

⁵⁴ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 290.

⁵⁵ LAW OF WAR DESKBOOK, *supra* note 49, at 33.

⁵⁶ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 11.

⁵⁷ *Id.* (currently China relies heavily upon the "'public good' that the U.S. Navy provides"). *But see* Tom Plate, *Asia's Rising Superpower Floats and Aircraft Carrier*,

focus when he states that China's efforts to increase its global economic footprint should concern the United States and India.⁵⁸ Such an assertion ignores the fact that the United States remains the top trading partner with China.⁵⁹

Kaplan supports China's rationale for control in the region, especially in the critical part of the new global playing field, that is, where the Indian Ocean meets the Pacific Ocean. The combination of oil deposits in the South China Sea and the congestion of shipping lanes with oil tankers and merchant fleets "make this region at the Indian Ocean's eastern gateway among the most critical seascapes of the coming decades."⁶⁰

This confluence of India meets China has caused India to continue "expanding its military and economic ties" with neighboring countries to the east and west.⁶¹ The Indian Ocean, as a central trade route, will be the center of economic progress and the key to global power.⁶² *Monsoon* shows that the United States will remain influential as long as the U.S. Navy patrols the area and as long as the Chinese remain reticent toward assistance. But, it is clear that China's acquiescence will come to a close.⁶³ At that time, the United States would be well served to have already positioned itself in the region using other foreign policy methods.

DAILY PROGRESS, Sept. 4, 2011, at B5 (discussing China's completion of its first ever aircraft carrier).

⁵⁸ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 286 (discussing how China is increasing its ties to "[c]ountries like the Philippines and Australia [that] will have China as their number-one trading partner").

⁵⁹ THE US-CHINA BUS. COUNCIL, <https://www.uschina.org/statistics/tradetable.html> (last visited May 29, 2012).

⁶⁰ KAPLAN, *supra* note 1, at 286.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 12.

⁶² *Id.* at 13.

⁶³ *Id.* at 283 n.2 (citing James Mulvenon that the Chinese "may be content to 'free ride' on the 'public good' that the U.S. Navy provides" since the Chinese are "many years away from having such a navy") (citing Gabriel B. Collins et al., eds., *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Inst. Press, 2008)).

IV. Conclusion

Monsoon is an insightful look into the policies of the United States with India and China, and how these nations walk a fine line of cooperation militarily, economically, and diplomatically.⁶⁴ However, Kaplan falls short when he fails to explain how the United States could better develop its foreign policy in the region, and instead blames the U.S. preoccupation with the land wars⁶⁵ of Iraq and Afghanistan as the primary reason China and India have taken the lead in the region.⁶⁶

While there is no discussion of international law concepts,⁶⁷ or any specific foreign policy plan for the United States, *Monsoon* does provide a thought-provoking view for international law attorneys, foreign policy experts, and investors to consider. *Monsoon* also provides a substantial analysis of the U.S. Navy's presence and influence in the region. The lesson learned from *Monsoon* is that the United States must continue to develop foreign policy in the region in order to reap future economic and political gains.

⁶⁴ *Id.* at xi (“For the sum-total effect of U.S. preoccupation with Iraq and Afghanistan has been to fast-forward the arrival of the Asian Century, not only in the economic terms that we all know about, but in military terms as well.”).

⁶⁵ *Id.* at xii.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at xi (discussing “the arrival of the Asian century, not only in economic terms that we all know about, but in military terms as well”).

⁶⁷ LAW OF WAR DESKBOOK, *supra* note 49, at 1–2.