

Book Reviews

Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power, by Robert D. Kaplan, New York: Random House, 2010, maps, index, glossary, 368 pages, ISBN 978-0-679-60405-1

Reviewed by Tim Lynch

From time immemorial the monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean provided energy that predictably moved sailing craft across vast distances in record time. The sea does not record marks of what transpired on its surface, but the places these ships visited were moulded by the cargo they carried and the people they transported. The opportunity for trade, adventure and reward motivated persons of all backgrounds to travel with the monsoons. The development of the railroads and the steam engine made monsoon winds and ports less important, but the desire to control maritime passageways and littoral communities has not diminished. It is an appreciation of how these trends have influenced the 20th century maritime world, and how they will affect maritime relationships in the 21st century that a reader will gain from Robert Kaplan's book *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*.

Kaplan conveys a historical, socio-geopolitical view of the region between the Cape of Good Hope and the Indonesian archipelago. Anyone unfamiliar with this region is in for a treasure of discovery. The book provides a prologue to the diminishing role of the United States in the world as a global maritime warrior. The strategic question posed is who will take its place – China or India? Both states are establishing relationships around the world in particular to ensure supplies of energy.

Among other things, the reader is treated to a discussion of how different forms of Islam evolved around the world over the years. As well Kaplan discusses Portuguese exploration of the Indian Ocean, pointing out that 23 years after rounding the Cape at the turn of the 15th century they had built some 40 outposts in the region. He uses the word 'crusade' to describe their efforts, acknowledging that their faith gave them strength. The Portuguese were medieval Europeans not having benefited from the period of secular enlightenment. They believed that defence of their religion – their prophet was the

Virgin Mary – through the slaughter of non-believers, mostly Muslims, assured them glory in heaven. This reader couldn't help but get the impression that history repeats itself when the author referred to 9/11 and current geopolitical imbroglios of the region.

The first major lesson to take from the book is that the Atlantic Ocean is very 20th century. The second lesson is that Kaplan predicts that in the 21st century fiscal pressures will force the United States to reduce its obligations in the Atlantic but its strategic interests will focus it on the Indian Ocean. Kaplan provides an interesting account of piracy in the region but does not discuss Canada's involvement in countering such activities. He reports that Canadian interests lost out to the Chinese in developing the port at Hambantota in Sri Lanka but this is his only mention of Canada's involvement in the Indian Ocean.

National awareness around naval matters in Canada is focused on the Atlantic port of Halifax with its ties to 'old Europe' and NATO. Few Canadians could point to Esquimalt – the home of West Coast part of the Canadian Navy – on a map. Canada could enhance its European ties by substituting for the US Navy in the Atlantic theatre and trust the USN to protect Canadian interests in the Indo-Pacific region. But as we think more about Canada's Arctic coastline, it may be a good time to encourage Canadians to define the country as a global maritime state. To accomplish this, Canada has to think about having a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region. This means a balancing of Canada's naval culture between its East and West Coasts.

Kaplan's book provides valuable insights of past and present maritime trends on the other side of the globe. The book contributes to understanding strategic maritime alliances in a region where many new Canadians originate and where most of Canada's future trade will focus. Its bibliography offers a range of references that could be interpreted from a Canadian perspective. Most enjoyably, Kaplan also provides a glossary of terms that will enhance the lexicons of all mariners.