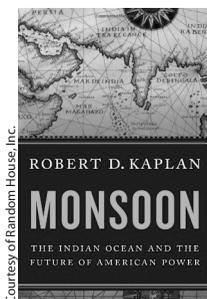


self-correct—and when it does, the credit for the turnaround, as the blame for the initial mistake, must rest not in the gods, but in ourselves.



New York: Random House, Inc., 2010

384 pages

\$28.00

Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power

by Robert D. Kaplan

Reviewed by Robert Killebrew, COL (USA Retired), held a variety of planning and operational assignments during his 30-year Army career

“It is my contention that the Greater Indian Ocean, stretching eastward from the Horn of Africa past the Arabian Peninsula, the Iranian plateau, and the Indian Subcontinent, all the way to the Indonesian archipelago and beyond, may comprise a map as iconic to the new century as Europe was to the last one . . .” writes Robert Kaplan in his pathbreaking new book, *Monsoon; the Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*; “For the sum-total effect of [US] 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.”

With *Monsoon* Kaplan returns to his strongest suit—geopolitical primers grounded in first-person travel to the world’s grittiest places. *Balkan Ghosts*, *The Coming Anarchy*, *The Ends of the Earth*, and *Soldiers of God*, take readers to places not many of us are liable to go willingly (though his excellent *Empire Wilderness* is revealing regarding the United States). This latest work is about the Indian Ocean and the lands along its rim; the Indian subcontinent to the north, eastern Africa to the west, Australia and Indonesia to the east, and the vast and lonely Southern Ocean to the south. First bound to the West by Portuguese explorers at the end of the fifteenth century, swept by monsoon winds whose predictable course favored sail, great civilizations and seafaring peoples flourished along its rim long before they were “discovered” and exploited by Europeans. As China and India emerge as future powers, the Indian Ocean and its littorals are likewise emerging as the future focal point for great-power struggle over the world’s trade routes—the great choke-points are here; Bab el Mandeb, Hormutz, Malacca—and the energy resources of Arabia and Africa.

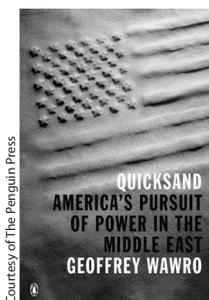
Struggles for influence and power in the region, though nothing new, take on extra meaning as China builds bases along the ocean rim to secure for itself the energy demanded by its economic boom and growth. Indeed, energy routes are the “silk roads” of the region’s future, binding together giant emerging economies and the ageless, tribal cultures and politics of the region, many of which are absorbing the outward veneers of modern life—the motorcycles, cell phones, and AK-47s of the developing world—with little change to the older rhythms of their histories. Hence, the Baluch, fighting for an ancient homeland that spans three countries—India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—who control the destiny, not of themselves, but of the ocean littoral that hosts Gwadar, potentially

a major shipping terminus on the Pakistani coast that is being built with Chinese money. So the future of the Baluch, like many traditional peoples in the region, is thus bound up not only in local interests, but also in the sweep of great-power politics whose origins are far beyond their reach. Likewise, the nations of the subcontinent—Afghanistan, tottering Pakistan, and booming India—the kingdoms of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, and the long list of the states of eastern Africa, all are entering the mainstream of geopolitical events after being overshadowed for centuries by the histories of the two other oceans.

Behind Kaplan's vivid travelogue—"Monsoon clouds crushed the dark, seaweed-green landscape of eastern Burma. The steep hillsides glistened with teak, coconut palms, black and ocher mud from the rains and tall, chaotic grasses"—and his firsthand accounts of the shifting kaleidoscope of religion, tribe, and caste that make up the politics of the region are two larger themes. The first, the future position of the United States and its inevitable naval competition with China, suggests that the most likely place for the navies of the two nations to interact will be the Indian Ocean, where both nations, along with India, see a growing importance of the region. Chinese naval expansion, though it includes Chinese efforts to breach the "first island chain" of the Western Pacific, center most on China's need to safeguard energy routes through the South China Sea and thus into the eastern Indian Ocean. In Kaplan's view, China's vital concern over energy and concomitant interest in the sea routes it must travel do not inevitably presage conflict with the United States, but must be managed by both nations to ensure smooth sailing for all nations engaged in legitimate commerce on these vital seas.

The second, and potentially more profound, theme is the power shift underway along the great basin of the ocean as the masses of people, and their governments, become at the one time more aware of the limits of Western—which is to say, American—power, and self-aware of their own potential. More than at any time since Western imperialism split the region into artificial nation-states, there is growing unity. Certainly the relative decline of Western power has something to do with regional awareness, but there is something else—a growing consistency, perhaps supported by Islam that suggests that the United States and its allies, even as we provide present-day stability to rulers around the rim, are going to have to adopt new approaches for the future. Kaplan says "Realpolitik with a conscience is what India, and the West, too, require, for in the broader competition with China, the power with the most benign and cosmopolitan vision will ultimately have the upper hand." Lurking behind the decline of American influence, the emergence of the states of the Indian Ocean littoral, and the masses of desperate peoples living hand-to-mouth, is the question of what regional unity will eventually portend as Western influence subsides. One recalls the historian Arnold Toynbee's comment that the borders between civilization and barbarism are never static, and if civilization stops expanding, barbarism inevitably triumphs. What kinds of forces, of states and creeds, will eventually push forward as the Indian Ocean reemerges as the seat of global competition and trade?

As with all of Kaplan's work, the reader will find it best to have maps available while working through *Monsoon*. The book itself has an excellent series of usable area maps, but a reader who does not want to constantly be flipping back and forth would be well advised to spread a detailed regional map on the table before opening the book's covers. A glance at a good map, for example, will immediately tell the reader why Gwadar is so important, or why on the Arabian Peninsula it is Oman, and not larger Saudi Arabia, that is the vital kingdom. *Monsoon* is a must-have addition to anyone seriously interested in international affairs; it is by turns illuminating, thought-provoking, and instructive. I recommend it without reservation.



New York: The Penguin Press, 2010

612 pages

\$37.95

Quicksand: America's Pursuit of Power in the Middle East

by Geoffrey Wawro

Reviewed by Dr. Christopher J. Bolan, Professor of National Security Studies, US Army War College.

Quicksand is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of America's involvement with the Middle East. Wawro's academic background in military history and practical experience teaching at the Naval War College come through with force in a style that will particularly appeal to military professionals.

The first third of *Quicksand* is especially enlightening as Wawro offers a fresh historical perspective informed by his meticulous research of military and diplomatic archives in the United States and London. This compelling narrative begins with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, and it is perceptively written from the perspective of key American and British policymakers. This is the best part of the book and will prove beneficial to scholars, students, and foreign policy practitioners alike. These first five chapters effectively chart America's deepening relationship with Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt—countries that have frequently occupied center stage in American regional strategies.

The author's two chapters on Israel tell the tragic story of Britain's ultimately irreconcilable promises to the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine. Wawro casts blame directly on British and American leaders for pursuing short-sighted strategies that left the problem of Palestine "insoluble" while providing "no practical means to intervene in Palestine and keep the peace between Jews and Arabs." At the same time, Wawro does not shy away from criticizing both Jewish and Arab leaders for their unwillingness to accept compromise, their failure to advocate mutual understanding, and their complicity in violence.

His chapter on Saudi Arabia identifies the centrality of oil to US regional interests and vividly illustrates America's transformation from one of relative energy autonomy to one of strategic dependence on oil production from the