Beyond the Headlines Event

Robert D. Kaplan

Author of the book
MONSOON
The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power

Moderator:
WARREN HOGE, Vice President for External Relations, IPI

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Warren Hoge: Well very appropriate that we're here tonight celebrating a book whose title is about climatic catastrophe, but I'm very glad as many of you made it here as you did. I'm Warren Hoge, IPI's Vice President for External Relations, and I'm really happy to welcome you to this Beyond the Headlines event, featuring Robert D. Kaplan, author of *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Powe*r.

I have led a professional and personal life of what has happily been fulfilled wanderlust. And I began it as a teenager working on ships in the summertime, ships that called at ports in Europe and North Africa and the Caribbean. And that experience taught me early on that one really insightful way to understand foreign countries is to approach them from the sea.

That's the approach that Robert Kaplan has adopted in his history scholarship, and in his writing. I first heard Robert talk about it a couple of years ago at a private lunch gathering where he counseled his listeners, who incidentally included Henry Kissinger, that in trying to assess the growing international ambitions of China, we would do well to keep an eye on how dramatically the country was increasing the size and the presence of its navy.

Robert has developed that vantage point into this thought-provoking book that he'll be talking to us about tonight. It's a book in which he travels, to this reader's delight, in an extremely evocative descriptive manner, the coastline of the greater Indian Ocean, an ocean surrounded by 37 countries, representing a third of the world's population.

The book's ports of call are not the usual ones of geopolitical travel, but ones that emerge as what he labels strategic nodes of global maritime commerce. They include Oman on the Arabian Peninsula; Myanmar, the former Burma; Stone Town, on Zanzibar off the East African coast; Gwadar in Pakistan; Hambantota, on the southern end of Sri Lanka; Chittagong in Bangladesh; Sumatra in Indonesia; and in India, Gujarat and Calcutta, or Kolkata as it's now officially known. In keeping with his high seas vision, he explores Kolkata in a particularly wonderful passage, or series of pages in the book in the same way that Portuguese traders did when they first arrived in the 16th century, by sailing up to the city, from the Bay of Bengal along the Hooghly River, a principal tributary of the Ganges. This itinerary of sea lanes and coastlines serves well his point that we tried to point up in your invitation when we noted that Americans have long been custom to maps that have the Atlantic and the Pacific, and then the Indian Ocean is sort of bifurcated up at the top in two little corners. That may have reflected westerner's priorities in the past, but for the 21st century, Robert places front and center the Indian Ocean.

Now in reading the book, I found myself continually referring back to maps at the beginnings of chapters, so we printed out one of them and placed it in your program, in your chairs, and also on the screens on the side here, because I think it may help you follow Robert and his literary travels tonight more easily and get the visual impact of the Indian Ocean's two halves – the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

In the book Robert argues convincingly that the shape of things to come can be found on these shores. It's in the littorals, he writes, "where global issues such as population growth, climate change, sea level rises, shortages of fresh water and extremist politics, the last of which is affected by all the other factors, acquire a vivid geographical face."

Vivid geography is one of the many pleasures of *Monsoon*, which, by the way, is on sale at the door, and Robert will be here after we finish to sign books.

That Robert is here at all is thanks to some emergency rearrangement we made yesterday that brought him here yesterday evening from his home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts which was already under a half foot of new snow this morning, and where the Weather Channel says it was still snowing all day today. Robert, I'm very glad you made it here. The floor is yours.

Robert D. Kaplan: Thank you so much, Warren. We've all been prisoners of two things in the United States. I realize you're from all over the world, the audience, but Americans in particular have been prisoners of two things.

One thing Warren mentioned, which is the Mercator projection, which is that rectangular map of the world in which North and South America are in the center, and the Pacific and Indian Oceans are split up and confined to the edges of consciousness, so to speak, and therefore not given their proper importance.

But the other thing is, we've all been prisoners of Cold War era area studies. At the end of World War II, the United States found itself a great power, and needed experts for all over the world. And so it had to divide up the world artificially for the sake of area expertise. University departments did this, the CIA did this, the State Department did this, the Pentagon did this. So we had the Middle East. We had Central Asia. We had South Asia. We had Southeast Asia. We had East Asia.

But in fact, what's been happening--and we see this all the time since the end of the Cold War--is that we're seeing a more fluid, organic continuum emerge whereby China affects Iran, and Iran affects India, and natural gas and oil in the Arabian Peninsula affects decisions made in China, so that everything flows together. And it's increasingly untenable to divide up the world so brutally in that sense.

And nothing so much signifies this new world we're entering, which is not a prisoner of the old North American Mercator projections, and is not a prisoner of Cold War area studies as much as an Indian Ocean map. And an Indian Ocean map really goes from the Red Sea in the Horn of Africa all the way to the South China Sea. That's the greater Indian Ocean and its shadow zone, so to speak. From Egypt to Taiwan, almost. It embraces the entire arc of Islam, from the Sahara Desert to the Indonesian archipelago.

And what's unusual about the Indian Ocean is that it is the only ocean of the world's great oceans that has a very particular wind pattern, the monsoon winds. Now when North Americans hear the word monsoon, they think of a disaster, of a storm. Of course South Asians see it differently. They understand that a monsoon is a weather system. It's a wind system. It brings prosperity. It's necessary for the agricultural cycle. When there's a good monsoon in India, and there are elections soon afterwards, it may benefit the party in power, because it helps the economy.

And the critical thing about the monsoon winds is that they're utterly predictable, to a much greater extent, at least, than wind systems in other oceans. So that the monsoon winds flow Northeast to Southwest six months a year, then reverse themselves like clockwork, southwest to Northeast the next six months of the year.

And because they're both reversible and they're predictable, sailors can predict sailing distances in times over long stretches of the ocean. Anyone who's a recreational sailor and just tries to predict what the winds are going to be this weekend off Long Island knows how incredible it is to be able to predict winds five months in advance over thousands of miles of ocean. And so because of the predictability of the wind systems, it's possible, it made the Indian Ocean very intimate.

It meant that the Indian Ocean was united thousands of years before the age of steam ships. It's because of the winds that you have the remains, the 8th century remains of Arab and Persian mosques in the coastal cities of China. It's because of the monsoon winds that you have large Yemeni communities in Indonesia, why you have large Malay communities in Madagascar off the coast of East Africa. It's why you have very large Omani communities all along the East African coast, because people were able to predict sailing distances, they could get somewhere and get back relatively quickly.

Vasco Da Gama, the Portuguese navigator, when he sailed from what is today Kenya, Northeast Kenya and the east coast of Africa to Calicut off the Southwest coast of India in 1498, he made the crossing across the whole Arabian Sea in 23 days. Now think about that, if anyone here is a recreational sailor. Thousands of miles in 23 days. Because he had an Arab navigator who understood the wind system and they caught the monsoon wind just perfectly.

Sailing back took them many months, because they sailed against the monsoon. They had to basically close haul the entire way.

And the Portuguese didn't so much discover India as they rediscovered the monsoon wind pattern which had been known to the Ancient Greeks and Romans. Because you find the remains, you find Roman coins and roman remains in East Bengal in Bangladesh, in West Bengal in India. The Portuguese and Romans—I mean the Romans and the Greeks got to many parts of the Indian Ocean, all the way down the East African coast, and what the Portuguese did was they rediscovered this wind system and reconnected the West to the East for the first time in 1,500 years. And that instituted the arrival of the west in the greater Indian Ocean, which made many peregrinations from Portuguese dominance to Dutch dominance to British dominance to the dominance of the US Navy at the end of World War II.

And which is only now starting to recede. The US Navy which had 600 warships during the Reagan era was down to about 330 warships during the Clinton era, is now down to 286 warships by last count. And because navies like air forces, naval and air platforms are so expensive, navies and air forces over the long run track the strength of the national economy in question, so that a Chinese economy that has been growing by 10 percent a year for the last 30 years is growing a great navy at leaps and bounds, while the US can barely keep the number of ships where it is. And the Indian navy will go from the 5th largest navy in the world to perhaps the 4th or the 3rd largest navy in the coming years.

So we're seeing the rise of indigenous naval powers throughout the greater Indian Ocean for the first time in 500 years. We're seeing, what this book really is about is the last phase of Western dominance in the Indian Ocean. And a key thing to keep in mind is, as this occurs, think of China moving vertically south towards the Indian Ocean, and India moving horizontally east and west along the Indian Ocean.

Let me explain. China is involved in great port-building projects in Gwadar and Southwest Pakistan near the entrance to the Straits of Hormuz. In Hambantota in Southern Sri Lanka, the southern tip of Sri Lanka which is near where 30,000 merchant ships cross, it's one of the great sea lines of communications. In Chittagong in Bangladesh, in Kyauk Phru in Burma near some great natural gas fields in the Bay of Bengal. And as it is building these state of the art modern ports, it's also giving tremendous economic and military aid to these Indian Ocean littoral states.

Now as I elaborate in the book, I don't believe that China intends to have actual naval bases in any of these places. That would be too provocative to India. And China is at great pains to convince the world, and to convince India in particular, that its rise is benevolent and non-hegemonic. But what China is doing, is it's starting—it's building the basis, the building blocks of the 21st century equivalent of 19th century British calling stations all along the Indian Ocean. Because keep in mind, the hydrocarbons, the oil from Saudi Arabia, the oil and natural gas from Iran, are being transported across the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Malacca and up to the growing middle class fleshpots of Asia, to the cities of China, South Korea and Japan.

So the Indian Ocean becomes the world's global energy interstate, so to speak. So you have the energy in the Middle East, the middle class customers increasingly in East Asia, and China wants eventually to have a blue water navy that will protect those sea lines of communications, to protect its merchant fleet, its oil tankers. Because it also wants warehousing facilities at these new ports to

store its own consumer goods for sale in Africa, for sale throughout the Middle East.

So but this in a way surrounds India. And India feels surrounded. At least India's strategic thinkers do. So as the Chinese spend 200 million dollars on a state of the art port in Gwadar, the Indians build a new port at Karwar on the Karnatakan coast south of Mumbai, for its naval warships.

Now as I said, India's moving east and west. What's interesting about India is that Indian thinkers, Indian strategic thinkers are more and more rediscovering the gifts of an old British viceroy, Lord George Nathaniel Curzon. Curzon may have been a British viceroy, but he looked out at the world from the same geographical perspective as Indian leaders today from the subcontinent. And what Curzon saw was that India was the heart of Asia. India needed influence in her almost Monroe Doctrine-style throughout the Indian Ocean, and Curzon's India was a greater India, that included what is today Pakistan, what is today Burma, Bangladesh, and greater India required shadow zones of influence that included the Arabian Peninsula, the Iranian Plateau, the southern part of Central Asia and the Gulf of Thailand.

And this is how Indian's strategic thinkers think today. For example, India for geostrategic regions has to have a close working relationship with Iran, because Iran has natural gas that India needs. India's helping to build roads between Iran and Afghanistan so that Afghanistan becomes more dependent on Iran and therefore less dependent on Pakistan. Closer relations with Iran help India to check Pakistan, so to speak. This is another example of how South Asia and the Middle East, the borders of area studies get broken down.

But the really most interesting country in the region to see this so far benign rivalry between India and China is Burma. Burma is chock full of natural resources. Rubies, diamonds, natural gas off the Bay of Bengal, timber, hydropower, and so on. So while the Chinese are developing a deep water port in Kyark Phru in Burma and constructing an oil pipeline to taken natural gas across Burma into Southern China, therefore making the Chinese a bit less dependent on the Straight of Malacca, and this is what they hope eventually for Gwadara and Pakistan too, find other ways to get into China rather than through the congested straight of Malacca, the Indians are building a deep water port at Sittwe, 50 miles north in Burma with the hope of transporting natural gas westward through Bangladesh by pipeline into India.

Because China is building roads and rail lines and developing natural resources in Burma, India, which is parliamentary democracy, still needs close relations with Burma which is one of the world's worst most benighted military dictatorships. Because India does not have the luxury to stand aside and watch China make Burma a semi-satellite state. So that India is giving economic aid to Burma and military aid to the Burmese military. So Burma is where you really see Indian-Chinese competition. As you will see increasingly in Iran in the years to come.

Let me just go over a few more things before I close up. Another main takeaway point of this book is that we're all focused now on the Middle East, and we probably will be in a new sense for some time. But keep in mind, it's not just economic might that continues to shift to East Asia and South Asia to what I call the Indo-Pacific region. It's also military might. China's military, its air force and navy is growing by leaps and bounds.

China will have more submarines than the US Navy in about 10 years. The Japanese Navy, even though Japan gets only 1.5 percent of its budget, of its GDP goes to its military, Japan has 123 state of the art modern warships. That's four times as many as the British Royal Navy. Southeast Asian countries have increased the sizes of their military by a third over the past decade. The real military growth, naval and air force growth that's going on in the world is going on in the South China sea in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean in the Western Pacific.

And especially in Vietnam. Vietnam just recently acquired six new submarines. One of the growing military relationships that goes unreported is the US-Vietnamese military relationship. US warships call regularly now at Vietnamese ports. The US is giving Vietnam nuclear technology like it is giving to India. Vietnam may have fought one war with the US, but it fought many with China, and it requires the US to check, to act as a balancing power against China in this region.

So military and economic activity is increasingly moving to the area that I cover in the book. Middle East militaries aren't growing as dramatically as that. And when we look at Asia we're seeing real civilian military post-industrial complexes emerge, complete with satellite systems, cyber-warfare capabilities, etcetera, which wasn't the case 20 or 30 years ago.

So we're moving back to a world where the real map we should all look at is that, the map up here, that goes through the whole southern Eurasian navigable rim land from the Horn of Africa up to the Sea of Japan. And it's this area of the world that's going to be the center of economic and military activity and one of the reasons I've emphasized the naval activity so much in the book and in the talk is that even in this jet age, 90 percent of all continental commercial goods travel by sea. You know the global shipping lanes are increasingly clogged. And so the future may very well be naval. And I'll close here and we'll open it up to a discussion. Thank you very much.

Hoge: Thank you, Robert. Staying with the map—I mean I'm glad we have the map, I love maps—you've got those three, you've got Bab el-Mandeb over there on the left, right by Yemen, between Yemen and Somalia. There's one choke point. You mentioned the Strait of Hormuz and you mentioned of course the Malacca Straits. I was intrigued in the book after you talked about that and you talked about tonight, you said that there are sort of some blue sky plans on the part of China to maybe build a land bridge, or maybe do some canalling across Thailand. Can you talk about that?

Kaplan: Yeah, sure. Right here, if you look at your map in Southern Thailand, this is the Isthmus of Kra, which is the narrowest point of the peninsula here, the long Malay-Thai Peninsula. There are plans on the books that the Chinese, the Japanese, the Koreans may help finance to dig a canal. It would cost approximately 20 billion dollars. It would be an engineering feat on par with the Panama Canal. But if there's enough commerce to justify it, it will happen at some point. Dubai Ports World is doing feasibility studies for land and rail bridges so that ships can leave goods and energy at one side of the Malay Peninsula and other ships will take them from the other side. They'll travel by rail. In other words, the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific will probably be more organically linked together in the future than they are at the present.

At the present we just have the Strait of Malacca, the Sunda Straits, the Lombok Straits, and the Makassar Straits here, but we'll probably have some things

added to it. Because the biggest steady growth in the global economy is in China and India, which means more merchant shipping in this area. And with more merchant shipping, the Straight of Malacca gets potentially more and more clogged, more and more prone to terrorism, you know to piracy. One thing about piracy. Piracy flourishes throughout Indian Ocean history during times of global prosperity. In other words, the more prosperity and economic growth there is, the more piracy there is.

Hoge: Another thing from the book, a lot of us know the Gulf States now. IPI has a relationship with the foreign ministry of the United Arab Emirates, so a number of us have been to Abu Dhabi a number of times. I've been to Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait as a reporter for *The New York Times* in the old days. We know that part. You have a fascinating chapter about Oman. That's the part I don't know. And I wanted to ask you about that, about the significance of Oman in the book, and also the fact that sort of towards the end of the book, you get down to Zanzibar, and you find out that that's where the Omanis got to. Can you talk a little bit about Oman the way you do in the book.

Kaplan: Yeah. In fact, Zanzibar, Oman was ruled from Zanzibar during some decades in the 19th centuries, odd as that may seem. Again, it's because of the monsoon winds that created a basically Pennsylvania Turnpike between East Africa and Oman where ships could get back and forth relatively quickly.

What's interesting about Oman is that it's an absolute monarchal dictatorship. I call it a Stepford of a place. Because people are generally satisfied. They have a problem with youth, large populations of male youth and all, but it's not the kind of oppression, it's not the kind of despair that you find in countries that have been in the news in the past few weeks. Tunisia and Egypt. Because it's a traditional absolute monarchy governed in the most liberal style possible. It's like something like Plato, or something out of the Greek classics. You have an absolute dictator or a Sultan, Sultan Qabus, who believes in primary school education, women's rights, environmental rights, gives large parts of the budget go to educational reform and things like this. They don't have a lot of oil and natural gas. They have some. It's only 3 million people. It's connected by very—the country is connected by very good roads. And in my travels there, people kept saying to me, what is this democracy you Americans are pushing on Iraq and other places? We have no democracy here and things work well. And nor is it a very oppressive state, because it does well on US State Department Human Rights Reports issued each year. Relatively few political prisoners. It's an example of just how varied the world is, and how you have different systems that work for different places. And you can have, if you have a monarchy that has real legitimacy and the monarch is a very wise person, you can have civil society. Oman is both a civil society and an absolute dictatorship at the same time.

I end the book in Zanzibar. Zanzibar of course during the, before the age of steam, was really the entrepôt, the center of the Indian Ocean world, where you had ships from all nations here would call at Zanzibar and then they would travel down through the Mozambique channel and around the Cape of Good Hope. Zanzibar is this incredibly cosmopolitan place. And it was even more in the 1950s and 1960s. You find Gujaratis there from India. You find Persians. You find Omanis. You find people from all over the Indian Ocean world in Zanzibar. And again, it was this whole part of the East African coast was conquered by the Omanis because they were able to get there easily.

And they were able to take slaves. That's the dark side of the Omani presence in East Africa. The dark secret that nobody wants to talk about. The incredible

slaving operations that went on there, and there's in Zanzibar I discovered this wonderful author, Abdulrazak Gurnah, who some of you may know of. I think if he writes a few more novels at the same quality as what he's already written, he'll be a contender for a Nobel Prize in another decade or two. Just he recreates this wonderful cosmopolitan Indian Ocean world in his novels.

Hoge: I must mention how wonderfully you describe the places you go to. After I got through the chapter on Oman I wanted to go to Muscat tomorrow. I mean apparently it was an extraordinary evocative place to be. Also just one more question—

Kaplan: Yeah. The architecture's extraordinary because of strict zoning. They don't allow tall buildings. It's not like Dubai at all.

Hoge: And also it has a relationship with Iran, yes? Which is so close?

Kaplan: Yes. Yeah. Oh, Iranians had tremendous political influence over Oman. They occupied it for certain periods. When Oman was weak, Persia was dominant in that part of Arabia. So the Omanis today, the Sultan has to have close ties with both the US Navy and with the mullahs in Iran. He's got to do both to preserve the countries independence. And he does it very well. He provides the US with a lot of military assistance, but he insists that it be very quiet. The last thing he wants is publicity.

Hoge: I'm going to leave the Indian Ocean just a little bit to go into the Western Pacific, but you do in the book as well, and you link it up. You say that, or you just said tonight, the Chinese want a Blue Water Navy. In the book you say the problem for them is Taiwan. Can you explain that?

Kaplan: Yeah. Taiwan just occupies a lot of their energies, their strategic thinking energies. They have 1,500 short-range ballistic missiles focused on Taiwan. Taiwan may look close to China, but it's 100 miles. Normandy was only 20 miles from the British Coast. So think of it in those terms. There were 270 commercial flights a week between mainland China and Taiwan. So Taiwan is gradually being Finlandized by China, very gradually. But at the same time, an amphibious military landing on Taiwan is still almost out of the question. So that the Chinese are fixated on Taiwan still, but as Taiwan continues to be Finlandized by China, there will come a moment or a point when most think tanks, most world military experts believe that the United States will not be able to mount a credible defense of Taiwan against China. Rand Corporation came out with a study two years ago that said by 2020 the US won't be able to defend Taiwan. The Chinese will have too many ballistic missiles focused on it, and too many air bases in the area, etcetera. Now when that happens, there won't be a war. There will not be, I don't believe there will ever be a war over Taiwan. I think once it's understood that Taiwan has been sort of enveloped by China, then that leaves the Chinese free to essentially concentrate on the first island chain from Japan down to Borneo, to really develop a navy that is looking beyond Taiwan, and eventually into the Indian Ocean. So that the real challenge for the United States as a great naval power in the Western Pacific is keeping its alliances secure in the era beyond when the United States will be considered to be able to credibly defend Taiwan.

Warren Hoge: Just keep going with that thought a minute. Imagining this sort of cooperation slash competition between the Chinese and the United States at sea. Could the Chinese overreach? Could they anger too many of the people in that region that will be as suspicious of the Chinese as a lot of countries had been of the United

States for sort of colonial reasons. You mention the fact that the Chinese are creating lots of ports. I know they're not going to stay there and run them, but still, after a while, I know there's a lot of resentment throughout Asia of Chinese sort of at an ethnic level. Does that carry over into the power politics?

Kaplan: I think it happened last year. I think in 2010 we saw the Chinese overreach. We saw them make noises about controlling the South China Sea, the way the US dominated the Caribbean in the late 19th and early 20th century. I actually had a Chinese senior colonel say to me, if you dominated the Caribbean, which was an international waterway, why can't we dominate the South China Sea? There was this dispute with Japan over the Senkaku Islands. There were a lot of diplomatic stirrings. It drove the Japanese and other countries, the Vietnamese especially into the arms of the US. So I think there will be an adjustment in Chinese policy, because China benefits simply by quietly growing its economy and growing its navy without saying very much about it. That way a new, basically a new reality comes to the fore, which is that the United States will have to give way somewhat in the Western Pacific in order to keep the region peaceful. It cannot dominate the Western Pacific like a private American lake the way the US Navy actually dominated it for the first decades after World War II. Those decades are over because Chinese sea power is growing as is the sea power of these other countries.

Hoge: Just two other comments you make in the book that reflect your regard for the sea. One is you say navies cooperate better than armies, and the second you say that I was intrigued by, "from the sea has come cosmopolitanism; from the desert, isolation and tribal conflict."

Kaplan: Yeah. These are big concepts. Let me try to deal with them in a few sentences. Yes. Naval battles don't involve civilian combatants. There are no human rights issues, because it's only land warfare where civilian populations become engulfed, and then you have human rights issues. Because the sea is a dangerous, anarchic element. There's a kind of brotherhood of the sea that sailors of all navies share and bring them together. Because they're separated physically, they're actually on ships separate from each other, and they have their own private nautical language. Navies tend to cooperate better than armies do. Also, navies can only land soldiers on shore, but navies can't have a big footprint inland. So that armies invade, navies make port visits, so to speak. So that navies, national navies tend to be less suspicious of each other than national armies do.

When I said that about from the sea comes cosmopolitanism, I was talking about the history of Oman again. Because Oman was really historically two separate countries. There was what was called Muskat, and Oman. Muskat was shorthand for all the posts along the sea, whereas Oman was shorthand for the interior desert. The interior desert was prone to influence by Arabia, what is today Saudi Arabia. Whereas the coastal ports were prone to influence by India, by Indonesia, by Thailand, by all these places. So that there were long stretches in Omani history when Muskat was more influenced by India certainly, and parts of the areas in the Bay of Bengal certainly than by the interior desert where it was much hard to go into. So that the coastal areas were always historically much more developed and much more sophisticated, more highly educated than the desert areas.

Hoge: Excellent. I'd love to get some comments or questions from the floor. Alberto here, wait for the microphone if you will and introduce yourself.

Alberto Turlon: Thank you. I am Alberto Turlon from the Burma Fund. I work for an agency which works on Burma and we watch closely what India and China are doing there. Thanks for describing very deeply the relations between Burma and India and China and the competition of both. And my question is related to that, and is about de-investments. You said the control of the Burmese Way, the so-called Burmese Way, so the way of avoiding the circumnavigation of Malacca Straits—

Kaplan: Yeah, and the Burma Road.

Turlon: And investments on infrastructures. Compared to the Chinese investments, the Indian investments at the moment are quite modest, because we talk about six billion dollars from China and 300 million from India. And this is the question. How India will and if they will be capable to counterbalance more actively the Chinese presence there, and what's the UN—the US stand on that? Thanks.

Kaplan: Interesting question. I think that the Burmese regime may be a semi-satellite of China, but the military rulers in Burma resent that very much. Like the North Koreans, they're terrified of Chinese dominance, even as they have no alternative but to lean on China. If there were to be a regime change in Burma, or some shift to a more open democratic or democratic-like order, which may very well be possible. We've seen in recent weeks how things can shift very quickly when you have old authoritarian regimes in power like in Burma. This may benefit India. Because a more open system in Burma would probably want to be less reliant on China. And remember, the middle class, the trading class in Burma throughout much of the 20th century was ethnic Indian. Amitav Ghosh wrote a whole beautiful novel about that, *the Glass Palace*, about the Indian merchant class in Burma from like 1900 right up through World War II. So I think the Chinese are nervous about what happens after this current sclerotic military order passes from the scene in Burma.

Another problem in Burma of course is that remember why the Burmese military came to power in the first place in 1962? Because of ethnic and regional conflict in Burma between the Chins, the Kachins, the Karens, and the Arakans and others. A third of Burma is non-ethnic Burman, and they have their own militias, their own armies, and a more democratic Burma could be a much more unstable Burma, rife with regional conflict. And this would also upset Chinese plans for pipeline construction across Burma.

And in terms of the US, the US has tried various approaches. It's tried to isolate Burma. That hasn't worked. When the Obama administration first came in, for the first year under the prodding of Senator James Webb from Virginia, he tried a diplomatic opening to Burma, which hasn't really worked either. So that I think the Americans are really leaning on the Indians now. The Americans feel it's useful that the Indians have this role in Burma, however modest it may be. Because India indirectly in and of itself represents Western interest in Burma to balance against those of China.

Hoge: Shamina?

Shamina De Gonzaga: Hi, Shamina De Gonzaga. I just returned from Taipei and I want to thank you for your very comprehensive analysis, and indeed and speaking to both Taiwanese people and Japanese people and others from the region there is this very widespread sense that those countries that were traditionally relying on US support in the case of an attack by China just can't count on that. And I'm wondering how is the US actually processing that decline in credibility and fulfilling that role? And my second question I think you referenced before the

piracy issue, and just from my own knowledge, if India and China are taking such an active role in that area, to what extent are they actually engaging in patrolling those waters for international transport of goods?

Kaplan: Yeah. Though the Obama Administration will not admit it, the degree that it has a grand strategy, its strategy is to try however hard it may be to shift focus from the greater Middle East to East Asia. And if you look at what has been the structural effect of the appointment of special envoys to Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, it's freed up the Secretary of State's time to go back repeatedly to East Asia. I think Secretary Clinton has been to Vietnam about four times now since she's been Secretary of State. She goes back and forth to, I think Condi Rice went a year without visiting Asia because so entrenched was she with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Israel-Palestine at the time. So the administration is really trying to shift its focus there to basically tell people we're here, we're not going away, we're not going to be diverted. Of course that's hard to do, because though we've come down dramatically in troop numbers in Iraq, it'll be at least three or four years before we're down dramatically in troop numbers in Afghanistan.

And then we have this kind of post-authoritarian turmoil that we'll be dealing with in Tunisia and Egypt and other countries. But I think the way the Americans are processing it is they realize they've been diverted in the greater Middle East, and to the degree that they can switch focus or at least switch focus maybe ten or fifteen percent will auger well for the United States in the region and globally, because this is the economic, increasingly the economic military center of the world. The Indians and the Chinese I think are both cooperating with piracy and off the Horn of Africa. It's interesting. The Chinese, the perceived Chinese threat has gotten Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia to cooperate more with each other, and that has had an effect with combating piracy in the Strait of Malacca, where they're all being tutored so to speak by the US Navy behind the scenes. But the US navy is not taking a public face on it. It's basically been a consortium of the navies of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia which have combatted piracy here. And the one good thing about piracy is it brings rivals together to combat it.

Hoge: We have a question in the front row. I just wanted to tell you that last week we had Jack Lang here, the former French minister, who now is a special envoy of the Secretary-General on the subject of piracy off the coast of Somalia. He talked about that cooperation, which as you said before, brings rivals together. He also talked about something he's trying to promote which is the creation of tribunals out there to try these guys.

Kaplan: Oh, on the high seas?

Hoge: Yeah. Well I mean the tribunals would be on the land, but it would try them. Anyhow, please, in the front row, here?

Kishore Mandhyan: Kishore Mandhyan, United Nations. Fascinating. Simply. Thank you so much. Number of short comments and a few questions. When you had Great Britain, or for that matter the Soviet Union go through the expansionary naval phase, you did have some deep intellectual infrastructure which underpinned Mahan, Guchkov. One doesn't really see the equivalents of that kind of intellectual infrastructure, either in India—I know less about China. It's simply driven by hiring more ships, renting more ships. There is no paradigm or framework. That's one.

The second point is that both India and China have tensions between a maritime tradition and continental tradition. They are both continental powers and potentially maritime powers. But when you look back at history, India hasn't had really a deep maritime tradition. Nor has China. So it opens the question that can they really pull it off in the same way as Great Britain did? Or the United States did?

That brings me to the third point, which is that they are in a development phase. Their infrastructures are being attended to now, which would all require tremendous investment in national infrastructure. And so to what extent will they have the—it's one thing to have a ship, it's another thing to have the gasoline for it. So to what extent will they have the operational discretion to really do what Great Britain did? So that's the third. The fourth point, of course, is—

Kaplan: Okay. I could give a whole other lecture on this.

Mandhyan: Yeah. Because I think is that there are a number of little, little things, you know for example India has populations in Southwest Asia which are not integrated into the countries. Less so in Southeast Asia. And they are important populations. And how do you protect them if they, tomorrow, have to be driven out for some reason or the other? There's the Karakoram Highway coming in from Central Asia through Pakistan and what role for railroads and roads in the broader architecture of the strategic look in this particular area? I'll stop there.

Kaplan: Okay. Let me start with, it's interesting about the intellectual framework. I taught at the US Naval Academy for two years, where there's a big building named after Alfred Thayer Mahan, the great American naval strategist at the turn of the 20th century. Mahan has not studied at the US Naval Academy. I don't think most students could say two or three sentences about him. But he is being read vociferously in China in translations. The Chinese study Mahan very much. And according to a new book that just came out, published by the US Naval War College, the Indians too, Indian naval officers are also starting to study Mahan. Of course, Mahan was a proponent of a big navy, the decisive battle of national greatness through large navies. He's kind of too much of a thumping nationalist for the US naval sensibilities nowadays. But the fact that he's becoming more revered in China and to a lesser extent in India says a lot about them. In terms of maritime continental, yeah. China is a continental power. And for most of its history, its land borders were disputed and fought over. The Chinese had hundreds of years—Chinese history is really about the drama between the settled people in the agricultural prop lands and arable lands of eastern and coastal China and the nomadic people on the plateaus of Tibet, Mongolia, etcetera. And this to-ing and fro-ing has really dominated Chinese history.

What's unique about China today is that China is at a more stable position in terms of its land borders than it's ever been in its history. And so when a continental nation like China goes to sea, it goes to sea not as a matter of course but as a luxury. And the luxury is that its land borders are secure so it can become a naval power. Just like the United States did not develop a great navy until Manifest Destiny was completed. It was only with the closing of the Western frontier that the US built a great navy. The same is happening, so to speak, in China. If you look at the Indian Ocean, India never went to sea because it wasn't like the Mediterranean where you had all these close by islands which lured sailors. It was just wide open oceanic expanse, and unlike Scandinavia, which was stony soil, not very arable, the Scandinavians had to go to sea for a livelihood. But India is very rich and fecund. It can—its soil is rich. So there was no reason to go to sea. Again, the fact that India is now going to sea is a luxury in

a sense that it has consolidated its… well, consolidated is a relative word. It's got one of the things hampering India, still, is that it doesn't only have one semi-failed state in Pakistan to deal with, but it's got problems on its border with Bangladesh and Nepal, which sap a lot of energy and strength from Indian naval ambitions. Infrastructure is going to be a big—it's more of a problem with India than with China I would say. China adds more paved roads per year than India has in total. Remember, what spurred Indian naval building tremendously was the 1991 first Gulf War, where the Indian navy was unable to evacuate its citizens from the Gulf countries. And this was like a national humiliation of sorts. So another one of the reasons its building a great navy is it knows it has ethnic communities off the coast of Africa and in the Persian Gulf.

Hoge: I was telling Robert beforehand and Ambassador Herman Schaper of the Netherlands that I was at a Council on Foreign Relations event two or three days ago and James Wolfensohn was there. And you keep hearing all these facts and figures trying to capture the size of what's happening and the rapidity of how it's happening, and his was one that was very arresting. He said that by 2050 India and China together would account for 50 percent of, what would you call it, world product. And that right after World War II, those two countries accounted for two percent. If I may quote you Herman, Herman then said well, if you went back around 300 years ago, it was India and China then had 50 percent also. So it's about the cycles of time. Are there any other questions? Yeah, please. Let me let you speak for yourself instead of speaking for you. Ambassador Herman.

Herman Schaper: No, thank you. I had a question. Yeah, my name is Herman Schaper. As you mentioned, the Europeans have been around in the Pacific and Indian Ocean for a couple of centuries, but then of course they left after the Second World War, militarily I'm speaking now, the Brits withdrawing and so on. But what you see over the last 10 years that Europeans have come back, militarily. I mean, several tens of thousands troops in the middle of Asia and Afghanistan, and now quite a number of European navies active in the anti-piracy campaign near Somalia and Yemen. So well the question now is how to analyze that. It could be just a coincidence. But at the same time it could be an expression of what you mentioned, that you cannot define many of the problems we face nowadays in geographical terms related to any specific region. You have to look at it more in a global fashion. So it also could be an indication that the Europeans are kind of answering to that trend by being active outside of Europe more and more, also in a military sense. So I have a question. Do you have any view on that, and in particular then would there be any room for a useful European role in the Indian Ocean, in India's interplay of the different players as you described it?

Kaplan: The European Union's economy I believe is larger than that of the United States. So when you have an economy that's large, it's going to be very active in China, in India, in other places. European navies are small and getting smaller. It's just a fact of life. And I don't see that changing unless there's a new kind of threat to Europe or unless, and also European navies will have more and more to do with the Atlantic, because the US Navy and Marine Corps are switching their focus more and more away from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. So as the US Navy and Marine Corps no longer consider the Atlantic as central even though the United States is an Atlantic country, that provides opportunities and responsibilities for European navies in the Atlantic and down all along the west coast of Africa where you could have massive humanitarian emergencies and other things of the sort. But in terms of a naval security role for Europe, I see very little.

Hoge: William, please. Just wait for the microphone if you will.

William Verdone: Thank you, William Verdone. China is mindful of the countries in the Bay of Bengal. But in the South China Sea there are a number of peripheral countries that have claim to Spratly and Paracel Island. Do you see an aggressive China there? Thank you.

Kaplan: A few months ago there was this flurry of news coverage when the Chinese supposedly declared the South China Sea a core interest. It turns out that the news reports were wrong. The Chinese never actually said that. So there was nothing new that happened. But if you look at Chinese maps, Chinese maps declare China's interest area going in a grand loop all near Vietnam, around towards Singapore and all the way around. So they're in direct contradiction to the claims of the Philippines, of Vietnam, of some other places. And also if you look at the map again you'll see that the most economically developed part of China faces the South China Sea. And the real competition that's going to occur, I think in the South China Sea is going to be between China and Vietnam. That is really, because the Vietnamese are really building up their military and naval capacities. They fought a war with China in 1979. Because of Hainan Island here, it kind of blocks the Gulf of Tonkin off from the rest of the Indian Ocean, and the Vietnamese are very worried about being cut off by China here. Because China's building submarine pens here for its submarine fleet on Hainan Island. So once again, the Gulf of Tonkin may be very important in the coming years. And as I tell people and people, their jaw drops, I say that Vietnam may be a more important country for the United States in the 21st Century than it was in the 20th, though for very different reasons.

Hoge: I'm going to call on somebody else, but I just want to tell you something quickly, slightly personal, which is that one of the wonderful things about this book is its description of Portuguese navigation in the 16th century, and I have a fascination with that because I lived in Brazil, I'm married to somebody from Brazil, and I have a stepdaughter who is married to a Portuguese businessman, lives in Lisbon. I was so fascinated by the world of Portugal in the book that I mentioned it to the deputy ambassador of the Portuguese mission here, whose last name is Cabral, which is a rather proud name in Portuguese society, because the Portuguese navigator who discovered Brazil was named Cabral. The ambassador of Portugal is named Cabral. Neither the ambassador nor the deputy ambassador, whose name is also Cabral, could come, so they sent a third person from the Portuguese mission, whose name is also Cabral. And finally, Robert is married to a Portuguese woman whose surname is Cabral. The floor is yours

Nuno Cabral: Exactly, it's more than I deserve. Thank you very much. My name is Nuno Cabral, and when you speak about Chinese naval influence and growing power, you speak about the numbers of course, and those are very clear and undeniable. But from my point of view, I think it's not off the mark is that part of naval power is the ability to sail in a massive force and freely, so to speak, and be accepted by key players, or key literal states. The United States are able to do that. The United States sail freely anywhere in the world, even in the Persian Gulf. Well, that's pretty conflictual there. At the same time, you said that China, if China tried to have a large naval base in the Indian Ocean, that would be seen as extremely provocative to a degree. So knowing that the main lines, the main trade lines that send gas and oil to China go through the Indian Ocean, do you believe that these trade routes will be able to be seen as secure from Chinese point of view without a naval presence there?

Kaplan: That's a very interesting question that I dealt with somewhat in a *Foreign Affairs* article that I published. And you see, China at the moment free rides off the United States Navy. It depends on the United States Navy to protect the sea lines of communication between the Middle East and East Asia. Now this is very convenient for China, but at the same time, given China's history of being invaded and carved up by Western powers in the 19th Century and the early 20th century, China eventually wants to be able to protect these vital sea lines of communication by itself without depending upon the US Navy. And remember, as long as it has to depend upon the US Navy to get its oil and natural gas from the Middle East, China is really unable, no matter how many submarines it builds, no matter what it does in the South China Sea, to ever really threaten US interests in the Western Pacific in an overt military way. Because then the US could easily retaliate by cutting off China's energy supply. So I think what China's goal seems to be is not to go to war ever, but to build up a kind of disposition of naval forces in both oceans so that it never has to fight but it also has a form of dominance, or where, let me sum up by saying this. We already live diplomatically and economically in a multi-polar world. But we still live in a uni-polar military environment because of the domination of the US Air Force and Navy. One of the points of this book is we're moving into a militarily multi-polar world as well. It's happening very slowly. It's happening off the headlines. But it's happening.

Hoge: I'm finally going to depart from the Indian Ocean, and I want to try to encourage people to buy the book because I really think it's so good. But a couple weeks ago when everybody was surprised by what happened in Tunisia, among the people who were surprised by it were my former colleagues who run the Op Ed page of *The New York Times*, and they cast about for an expert, and of course the person they came up with was Robert D. Kaplan. And you wrote a fascinating piece about Tunisia, and I just want you to replay that if you will. Basically it was a piece that played off of Robert's, as you've heard tonight, understanding of history and how that matters, and it was about the uniqueness of Tunisia and the possibilities that presents. And I found it fascinating, if you could just end the night by telling us that thesis.

Kaplan: Sure. As we look—Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and we see, like we look at it in broad brush strokes, revolt, Arab world, demonstrations, keep in mind that each country is unique. And its uniqueness will ultimately determine where these uprisings eventually go in each place. So let me talk about the uniqueness of Tunisia for two minutes. Tunisia is a real state. It's not an artificial geographical expression. If you look at a Roman map of classical antiquity where the Roman settlements were, you'd see they're all coagulated and black where Tunisia is today. The close to Carthage, the higher the level of civilization. Modern Tunisia approximates the Roman province of Carthage. The roads you travel in the northern two thirds of Tunisia were all original Roman roads. And it wasn't just the center—Tunisia was to Rome what India was to Britain, the jewel in the crown. And it wasn't just under Roman rule that Tunisia was so cosmopolitan and developed. It was the same under Byzantine rule, under Vandal rule, under the medieval Arabs, during the Ottoman Turkish period. So it's a real state. And what also made it a real state was it had a very unusual ruler from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s, Habib Bourguiba wanted a small army and he wanted a lot of money to go to, like the Sultan, of Oman to women's rights to schools to road building, and he took this Roman tradition of a real state and really built institutions and ministries that actually functioned. So that, and Tunisia has no ethnic problems. It's got no sectarian divisions. It was perfectly prime for a democratic experiment, in my opinion, since the late 1980s. The fact that it remained a dictatorship until recently was to me an anomaly, so to speak. And so Tunisia has probably the best possibilities of any Arab country so far that's been

in result to have a real stable moderate democratic system, sort of like Turkey, going forward, because it's a real state where people have argued about the budget and mundane things like that going back decades than argue about existential matters and ideological matters so to speak.

Hoge: Okay, go. Just wait for the microphone please. And if you'd introduce yourself.

Luv Puri: My name is Luv Puri and I'm consultant to the UN. Your book has been very popular in South Asia. It's satiated the appetite for Indians to be taken as a great power. But my query was about this article. You mentioned that why Tunisia was ripe for revolution like this, but you also mention that why this revolution cannot be replicated in Egypt, but something is happening over there, and might be just a routine change, like do you want to make a course correction?

Kaplan: Well yeah, yeah. What I'd like to—one thing when I saw the article the morning it was published I got a very queasy feeling, because the subhead was "Not likely to spread." And I never said that in the article. The article was much more nuanced. I gave the reasons why the Tunisian secular moderate approach may not spread. But I also then said that because of social media and because of Arabic language cable TV, the Middle East is now a virtual community in the way that it wasn't before. And this argued for the seeds of the Tunisian rebellion to spread to other places. But then I said, we shouldn't be cheering this, because it could turn out very differently in different places. And what's going on in Egypt, this is a fast-moving target of a news story. It looks different every 48 hours. And how it can look 3 or 4 weeks from now could be very different than how it looks tonight. Remember all the peregrinations that, not just the Iranian revolution, but the Indonesian revolution against Suharto went in the late 1990s went through. It took literally a year and a half for it to really become clear what direction this thing was going. It was only clear about three years later that Indonesia after all was going to have a relatively moderate, relatively stable democracy replace Sudharto. It took three years for it to become apparent. So I'm not going to make any predictions. Because this is a very fast moving event and people like Mohammed ElBaradei, they were great in one sphere running the Atomic Energy Commission, but they have no experience in what they're doing now. So they could be undermined or undercut very quickly. The Islamists have no real experience in what they're—so this thing is very dicey.

Hoge: As you can see, we could continue this *tour d'horizon* a long time. We have to end it now. Robert is staying. Robert will sign books and I'm sure you can have a conversation with him. Robert, thank you so much.

Kaplan: Thank you.