

Book Review

***Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the end of a stable Pacific*, 1st edition. By Robert D. Kaplan. Random House, New York. 2014. ISBN 978-0-8129-9906-8. 225pp. Paperback, \$18.**

Masood Ahmed

The ascending power of China has precipitated a glut of books on the role of China in the 21st Century among which *Asia's Cauldron* by Robert D. Kaplan looks at the changing realities of the 21st century as China rises after decades of slumber and the centre stage of the world moves towards the East.

Robert D. Kaplan was chief geopolitical analysts for Stratfor, a private global intelligence firm, till December 2014. Presently, he is a Senior Fellow at the Center for New American Security in Washington D. C. In 2011 and 2012, he was named by Foreign Policy magazine as one of the world's top 100 global thinkers.

The book represents an American perspective on the changing power dynamics of the globe as a result of ascending economic and military power of China. The focus of the book is on the South China Sea that holds oil reserves of several billion barrels and an estimated nine hundred trillion cubic feet of natural gas rendering it as the simmering pot of potential conflict hence the book is given the name *Asia's Cauldron*. The title page shows a picture where top half consists of Junk, ancient Chinese sailing ship and the bottom half consists of modern cargo ship alluding to the centrality of maritime trade that gives South China Sea its global importance since ancient times.

Expounding on the insecurities faced by the smaller nations of South China Sea, Kaplan builds the case for greater role of USA in the region to keep the balance of power that has been shifting in the favor of China since the beginning of the new millennium. The countries covered are Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and Taiwan. The territorial aspirations of each nation towards richly resourced South China Sea and their clash with China's own proclaimed image of grandeur has been the central theme of the book.

The course of evolution taken by each country of South China Sea after World War II is described as the reflection of the personalities that led them. Marcos, Mahatir, Chiang Kai-Chek Lee Kwan Yew all have taken their nations out of the debris of World War II and shape their future for better or worse. However, it seems that the author has taken the reader too deep into the biographies of these leaders to prove the point that pro-western leaders were either wrongly portrayed as ruthless autocrats by historians, as in the case of Chiang Kai-Chek, or rightly depicted as benevolent autocrat as in the case of Lee Kwan Yew.

India though not part of South East Asia is conspicuously present as the historical links of India to South East Asia have been highlighted, especially in the case of Vietnam. To diminish the cultural affinity of the nations of South China Sea with China, the Indian links of India to South East Asian nations have been highlighted thus rendering South China Sea as the centre of a geo-political entity called Indo-Pacific. No doubt, dubbing South China Sea as

the confluence point of Indian and Pacific Ocean aligned with the US foreign policy where America seeks the partnership of India to counter the role of China in the waters of South China Sea.

In developing the case of greater role of America in the region, the protracted war with Vietnam and evacuation of the US naval bases in Philippines in the 1990s are designated as the facts belonging to the bygone era. The return of the US naval power in the waters of South China Sea shows that the realities of the 21st century are in total contrast with the anticipation of the US policy thinkers at the start of the century.

Despite propounding the thesis that each country in South China Sea is wary of the hegemony of China, the author struggles in positioning China as a hostile nation towards its neighbors. The economic growth and prosperity that have been witnessed by the countries of South East Asia is in tandem with the growth of Chinese economic power. Furthermore, the book does not mention how the countries in South China Sea are reconciling themselves with resurgent China. The links between China and the countries in the South China Sea are spread over millennia hence the rising China is not a new phenomenon and smaller countries are eager to gain than loose with greater economic and political integration with China. Asia's rise is not merely the rise of China.

One of the strengths of this book is the connection of myriad historical, cultural, political and economic themes into one seamless narrative. At times reader wonders if the book is a travelogue where one reads about ancient ruins and modern shopping malls. Delving deep into the history author introduces adventurous characters like Koxinga and Tomas Corrales who are still relevant in shaping the future of South China Sea. At the end one is left with a feeling that author has done a commendable work in presenting the complexity of the nations of South China Sea in a coherent and cogent way.

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Political Order and Political Decay: From the Age of Democracy to the Age of Illiberalism. By Francis Fukuyama. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-374227357. 672 pp. Hard Cover. \$ 35.

Nabiha Gul

Modern states and changing nature of politics have been the subject of interest for political and political scientists. Scores of volumes have been written from different perspectives covering the origin of state system, the evolution of state, development of supranational entities to the global market system to the implications of transnational globalization, with the growing interconnectedness of the world. The book, *Political Order and Political Decay*, instigated research studies on the rule of law in many countries.

To bring a comprehensive and an interesting account of the state, Francis Fukuyama has contributed an account from the prehuman times to the globalization of the world. The book's argument that functioning and successful states are characterized by the rule of law and accountability.

The book, a cohort of the first volume, *The Origins of Political Order*, by Samuel P. Huntington's classic. Political Order and Political Decay: An Account of the Evolution of Government and Politics from the State to the Global Market. In some success stories, Fukuyama critically examines the "decay" of modern state system in many countries.

The first volume, *The Origins of Political Order*, presented a critical argument on "how the state, rule of law and democracy emerged or failed to emerge, in China, India and the West. It is an assessment of the evolution, development and the impact of political order and democracy beyond French Revolution.

The current volume hence resumes the narrative left off, presenting to readers an account of the evolution of the state in the last two centuries; how they interacted with the social dimensions of development and the impact of the state on the US and in other developed democracies. The book, *Political Order and Political Decay: Institutions, Democracy and Political Development*, discusses how societies develop strong, impersonal, and accountable institutions. It discusses the changing political systems and the impact of dysfunction and decaying contemporary political systems on the rule of law, of corruption on governance, and why so many countries are failing. The author explores the different legacies of the state.