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Maritime Domain Awareness and Coastal Insurgency in Nigeria's South East

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Abstract

The historiography of Nigeria's southeast seemed to have overlooked its geographical peculiarities as an area awash with maritime features and vulnerable to maritime based crimes in the form of coastal insurgencies. The paper located Nigeria's Southeast in the context of the extant relationship between maritime domain awareness and coastal insurgency. It identified the maritime domain of the southeast as thriving in the "gray area" between criminal activity and armed conflict necessitating a range of military operations. The paper argued that Nigeria's southeast suffered all the trapping of coastal insurgency manifested in varying dimensions of maritime threats. It identified this to thrive upon weak maritime domain awareness (MDA) made possible by the wholesome combination of weak state capacity, governance capacity, location of strength gradient, ungoverned/ungovernable spaces, and vulnerability quotient.

Introduction

Nigeria has an expansive maritime domain where extensive maritime activities take place. However, often in the study of Nigeria's southern maritime geography, the southeast of Nigeria is not considered a significant component of the maritime domain in the context of its blue, green and blue waters.¹ This has given rise to the landlocked perception of the southeast of Nigeria. The southeast has many creeks, rivers and rivulets in the south east which provide both sanctuary and access for entrepreneurs of violence. Weapons are ferried through the network of rivers, rivulets and creeks increasing the incidence of the availability of small arms and light weapons. Moreover, weapons are smuggled in through official and unofficial ports. Besides, official and unofficial ports attract criminals, vandals and terrorists. The paper sets out to examine dimensions of maritime insurgent activities in the southeast cocooned in the wider problems of criminality and disorder in the water

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bodies of the southeast. It sets off by debunking the landlocked perception of Nigeria's southeast. It then proceeds to illuminating the concept of maritime domain awareness coopting its relationship with maritime threats. The challenges facing the institutions responsible for MDA

Nigeria's South East: Unlocking the Landlocked Perception

Nigeria's southeast is a unique geographical area that has changed over time. As a result of European conquest, Southeastern Nigeria has undergone significant economic, political, geographical and social changes. It has been known as Eastern Nigeria, southeastern Nigeria, the Eastern Provinces and the trans-Niger provinces. The "Eastern Province" was the easternmost of the three administrative divisions into which the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (1906-1913) was divided. It took in much of what later became the "Eastern Provinces," but not all. The Eastern Provinces covered four of the provinces of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, which Lord Lugard created in the process of the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914.² These provinces lay east of the River Niger and by 1917 were made up of Onitsha, Owerri, Calabar and Ogoja.³ In 1956, these four provinces became the Eastern Region of Nigeria covering just more than Igbo-speaking areas. Its relationship with and connection to the Niger river and the Bight of Biafra, historically challenged the misleading contemporary conception that the southeast remained landlocked. The Eastern Region metamorphosed into the Southeastern region with the geopolitical division of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones. The geopolitical southeast circumscribed Abia, Anambra, Imo, Enugu and Ebonyi states.

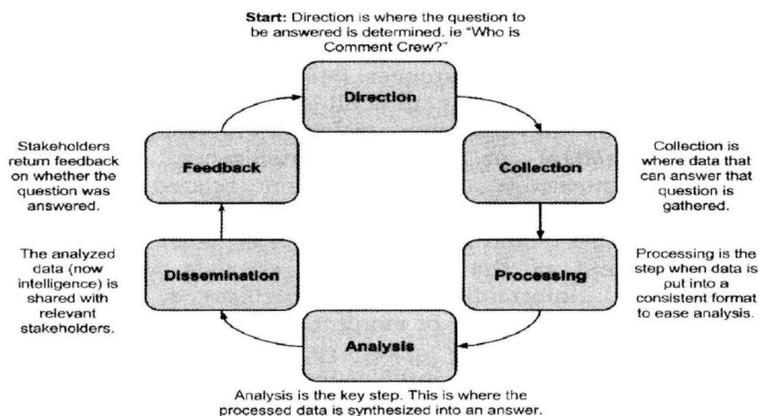
Indeed, the popular position that the Southeast of Nigeria is landlocked has been sustained. Arguably, the body of land occupied by Nigeria's southeast does not jut into the sea or the Atlantic Ocean. This however, does not make the southeast land locked *strictu sensu*. The Niger waterway on the western border of the southeast as well as extensive navigable rivers and water bodies in the Southeast, connects seamlessly into Nigeria's overall coastal landscape and maritime architecture. The Bight of Biafra has survived as an extensive maritime zone linking the hinterland of the southeast to the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean.

Moreover, expansion or dredging of some of the waterways negate the landlocked perception of the southeast. Some of the bodies of navigable water include the Niger River, Imo River⁴, Anambra River⁵, Otamiri River⁶, Mmamu River, Oguta Lake, among others. This makes for the maritime composition of the southeast. Consequently, beyond the rather misleading conception of being landlocked the southeast situates significantly in the maritime domain discourse. The precolonial growth and development of trade among the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria involved significant maritime dimensions.⁷ Indeed, while the trade was without rulers,⁸ they were not also without rivers. The maritime domain served as an unavoidable frontier for intergroup relations with other non-Igbo groups across the southeast.⁹

Maritime Domain Awareness and Dimensions of Maritime Threats

Security threats in coastal waters necessitate the need for maritime domain awareness (MDA). The assertion that "calm water is frequently difficult to find" highlights the ubiquitousness of maritime violence. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) or maritime intelligence relates to actionable knowledge on all maritime related activities, infrastructure, people, cargo, and vessels and other conveyances that could impact the security, safety, economy, or environment of the state. MDA consists of two key components: information and intelligence. Maritime intelligence is the product of monitoring and surveillance. As echoed by Shemella,¹⁰ the gathering, fusion, and dissemination of maritime intelligence facilitate other aspects of maritime governance. Consequently, from foreign naval threats, to maritime violence, to weather prediction, to the safety of individuals and ports, maritime intelligence allows governments to remain tuned in to the pulse of life in the maritime domain. It involves the effective understanding of all activities, events and trends in the maritime domain that could threaten the safety, security, economy, or environment of the state concerned.¹¹ Efforts to detect, identify, track, and evaluate maritime activity within a specified geographical area are often referred to as achieving MDA.¹² Indeed, all efforts to gather knowledge on maritime environments in order to gain situational awareness for mission accomplishment make for MDA.

MDA assists states in: accurate maritime terrain analysis; spatiotemporal clustering of marine environment; checkmating the effect of climatic change on ports and maritime infrastructure; carrying out Trustworthy and Sustainable Operations in Marine Environments (TWOSOME) and; deterring seaborne invasion. Consequently, achieving MDA depends on the ability to monitor activities in such a way that trends can be identified and anomalies differentiated. However, achieving awareness of the maritime domain is challenging given the vastness of the oceans, the great length of the shorelines, and the size of port areas which provide both concealment and numerous access points to the land. To this end, geography alone has been argued to play major role in determining a nation's ability to meet its MDA challenge.



The MDA Cycle

Source: Timothy J. Doorey, "Maritime Domain Awareness," in Paul Shemella (ed.), *Global Responses to Maritime Violence: Cooperation and Collective Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016, p. 126.

MDA is arguably the basis for maritime related violence including coastal insurgency. Coastal insurgency is a subset of overall maritime violence which makes for a set of threats occurring in or at the edge of maritime domain. Other aspects of maritime violence include but not limited to maritime terrorism, piracy, maritime robbery, maritime banditry,

maritime smuggling, bunkering, and poaching as well as illegal and unreported fishing.

Institutions and Agencies at the Forefront of MDA in the Southeast

MDA is carried out by institutions and agencies of the Nigerian state. These include the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Nigeria Police Force (NPF).

Maritime Violence in the South East's Maritime Domain

The slave trade and its attendant small wars¹³ which lasted for four centuries connecting four continents (Africa, Europe, North America and South America) had penetrating effect in the geographical *cum* geopolitical area that came to be known as the South East of Nigeria greatly exploited the weak MDA of the region. The southeast during the transatlantic slave trade served as a rich source of slaves. In the course of the abolition of the slave trade, the area became a major battle zone between the British Preventive Squadron and unyielding slave merchants in the period between 1807 and 1860.¹⁴ The trade and its abolition both exploited and exposed the weak MDA in the southeast. Slave merchants and abolitionist alike thriving on the casual knowledge of the maritime domain of the southeast, accommodated their respective objectives. Given that "the abolition of the slave trade on the Atlantic was perhaps more than half the battle in the campaign against the slave trade in the interior,"¹⁵ the incidence of violence increased hinterland to make way for the new set of traders, political officers and their agents or missionaries. Indeed, the Bight of Biafra served as a "sure and secure base" from which British imperial objective was taken into the hinterland of southeastern Nigeria.¹⁶

The palm oil trade overlapped the trade in slaves in what appeared to be a dialectical process. For the duration that the slave trade coexisted with the palm produce trade, a weak MDA had allowed for that, especially on the side of the British abolitionist. The naval squadrons stationed at the Atlantic and the Bight could provide retrained projection of domain awareness on the situation in the hinterland. MDA was needed to bring the slave trade to a halt and this was not successfully explored by the British. Such MDA was limited to visual observation at sea and from ashore, use of

informants, spies, and the naval squadron. However, actionable maritime awareness appeared weak as slaves were still ferried through Oguta Lake and other maritime bodies in the southeast.

Like the trade in slaves, it also took advantage of the weak MDA of the region. Palm produce were smuggled the same way slaves were smuggled and the rivers of the southeast served as solvent couriers of the process. The ability of slave boats to bypass abolitionist efforts showed the extent to which maritime intelligence was exploited.

During the Nigerian Civil War, the maritime domain was greatly exploited by both sides (Nigeria and Biafra) to prevent an early win and forestall an early defeat. Maritime infrastructure in the southeast suffered damages during the war. Poor MDA in the southeast resulted in losses measured in terms of infrastructural attack. The Niger Bridge – A 1,4000m length of steel and concrete infrastructure constructed by the French construction giant, Dumez, at the cost of 5 million pounds between 1964 and 1965, served as a link of trade between Onitsha *cum* Southeast and the rest of Western Nigeria – was attacked and rendered unserviceable for the duration of the war (1967-1970). The same for Echoba bridge which provided the link into Oguta and the Owerri hinterland. Oguta Lake was utilized by the Nigerian military as a coastal scene for maritime borne operations into the heartland of the southeast. Given the weak MDA, Army efforts at Oguta appeared fruitless. The Nigerian military faced very little challenge in the occupation of Oguta through the waters. From Oguta, Egbema oil fields, Biafra's remaining source of crude oil as well as Uli Airport, Biafra's surviving window to the world were threatened.¹⁷

As the war came to an end, maritime violence witnessed a considerable surge as most decommissioned and redundant sailors/soldiers found employment and engagement in maritime crimes. In the post-civil war era, the South East was not immune to the ambiguous and complex coastal insurgency of the Niger Delta insurgency as two states in the South East (Abia and Imo) are part of the Nigeria's crude oil conceptual Niger Delta – Nigeria's most extensive maritime domain.

Challenges to Effective MDA in Nigeria's Southeast

Five set of challenges are identified as impeding MDA in the Southeast: State Capacity (SC), Governance Capacity

(GC), Location of Strength Gradient (LSG), Ungoverned/Ungovernable Space (US) and Vulnerability Quotient (VQ). State capacity is central in the causal explanation of maritime insurgency. It implies the capacity of the state to effectively police its territory. In the field of international security studies, which circumscribes defence, war and conflict¹⁸, state capacity is viewed as a multidimensional concept¹⁹ that has a prominent place in the literature on the causes of armed conflict²⁰, the intensity of armed conflict²¹, its duration²², the proliferation of armed social actors²³ and human rights abuse.²⁴ Fearon and Laitin²⁵ related the concept of state capacity to insurgency on the premise that the risk of rebellion appears to increase as state capacity declines. In their argument, the risk of insurgency increases as state capacity declines and the supply of rebels increases if the state is “weak” and cannot effectively police its territory. Sobek²⁶ opines that strong states have a decreased risk of experiencing insurgencies. From the small wars of the slave trade period through the civil war, the southeast has shown an acute lack of the capacity to manage violence within its geographical space. Oguta lake was a significant coastal war theatre during the Nigerian Civil War. However, this maritime environment lacked effective and efficient MDA made possible by weak state capacity to either repel or deter a seaborne invasion. As captured by Alexander Madiebo, Commander of the Biafran Army, “when all of no trenches had been dug because no one ever dreamt that Oguta could be threatened or was going to be threatened at such a short notice.”²⁷ This reality made True of Wendell Phillips assertion that “eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”²⁸ The liberty of the Biafran state, through the Oguta maritime corridor, was foiled given the lack of MDA of the area. In all, state capacity measured in terms of technological capacity, military capacity, governance and administrative capacity, deterrence capacity, among others, has been central to the cause, duration, intensity and termination of coastal insurgency in the southeast.

Governance capacity builds upon state capacity to challenge effective MDA in the southeast. Governmental capacity is the extent to which governmental agents control state activities and resources within the government's territory.²⁹ Governance connotes a system of rules and procedures created for the purpose of solving collective problems and instilling and maintaining order within a

specific domain. Governance systems encompass institutions, laws, and norms that allow specific groups or societies to organize. Governance systems are found in formal systems, such as state governments, and informal systems such as the loose rules or generally accepted norms that can guide behavior in social groups. These systems can be analyzed in terms of their structure: the processes and strategies by which they attempt to accomplish the tasks of solving problems and maintaining order.³⁰ The difference between state capacity and governance capacity lies in the difference between the state and the government. A government at a particular point in time is in charge of the state but the former is a short-lived collection of individuals whereas the latter, in its ideal type at least, is a long-lived entity consisting of many bureaucratic agencies and departments that have a measure of independence from the particular government that is in charge.³¹ From the slave trade period, through the period of palm produce commerce, to the colonial period, even dipping into the post-colonial civil war theatre; governance capacity defined the manifestation of violence in Nigeria's southeast.

Location of Strength Gradient (LSG) has been a significant challenge to MDA in Nigeria's southeast. The ability to deter and intercept entrepreneurs of violence utilising the maritime domain has been a function of LSG which connotes the projection of government power to theatres and corners vulnerable to insurgent activities. Boulding³² used the concept to explain the military reach of states. Markowitz and Fariss,³³ note that as LSG increases, insurgents will locate geographically farther away from a government's centre of power in order to find adequate shelter from detection and incarceration by regime authorities. In Blechman and Kaplan's³⁴ view, strong power projection ability allows states to employ maritime security over long distances, and thus increases its ability to coerce, deter, attack or defend. Strong power projection ability allows states to employ maritime security over long distances, and thus increases its ability to coerce, deter, attack or defend. As the location of state power contracts non-government entrepreneurs of violence will locate geographically farther away from the state in order to find adequate shelter from detection and incarceration by regime authorities.

From the maritime dimension, the Nigerian state has appeared to have lean maritime presence in the southeast, a

consequence of the assumed landlocked perception of the area. The Eastern Naval Command with its headquarters at Calabar, overlaps the southeast but hardly oversees the maritime domain of the southeast. While other parts of the Niger Delta appear sufficiently covered by the Nigerian Navy, there appear to be a lean presence in the southeast.

As the projection of state power under the LSG concept misses peripheral locations, those locations become ungoverned and in most cases ungovernable given its duration of remaining ungoverned. And such spaces that lay beyond the reach of the effective policing and governance of the federal, state and local government. In Nigeria's southeast, such spaces are have peculiar terrains which discourage government sustained presence. In turn, they lack sufficient police, military, and intelligence forces to monitor activities of various entrepreneurs of violence. Consequently, such entrepreneurs of violence have organized and operated in such ungoverned spacing, utilising it as sanctuaries, because while they may be ungovernable, they are not altogether uninhabitable.

The vulnerability quotient combines the four factors afore stated. States make themselves vulnerable by eroding their SC, GC, LSG, and US. States that are not capable of fulfilling their maritime security mandate may provide opportunities for maritime-related crimes such as piracy, smuggling, and hijacking, among others. Nigeria's southeast makes for an area that rarely fulfills its maritime security mandate thereby making its coastal area safe for insurgents. Although in practice, it is unrealistic to believe that any nation could achieve an omniscient awareness of its maritime domain. Doorey³⁵ has noted that even the United States, with its vast federal, state, and local resources, including the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and various law enforcement agencies, routinely fall short of omniscient awareness, as evidence by the vast quantities of illegally smuggled people, drugs, and other contraband that successfully enter the country every year by maritime conveyance. Nations possess varying degree of vulnerabilities to maritime related crimes.

Conclusion

The paper set out to demystify the landlocked perception of the southeast and link it to the overall active

threat faced by other maritime areas of Nigeria's south over time. The maritime domain in the Southeast was significantly more challenging for state and government control because it served as a transition zone fraught with ambiguity and complexity. The southeast faced with the challenge of weak state capacity, weak government capacity, location of strength gradient, ungoverned/ungovernable spaces, and vulnerability quotient hardly mastered its maritime domain. The result was varying dimensions of violence and instability since the slave trade period. The paper concluded that national projection of maritime power is arguably a function of robust state capacity measured in terms of the loss and location of strength gradient. Strong power projection ability allows states to employ maritime security over long distances, and thus increases its ability to coerce, deter, attack or defend. MDA was viewed as the basis of maritime governance providing eternal vigilance and coastal Insurgency was pictured as an outcome of failed MDA.

Endnotes

¹Blue water is seen as "the open ocean", green water as "coastal waters, ports and harbors", and brown water as "navigable rivers and their estuaries". See, "Martin N. Murphy, "The Blue, Green and Brown: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency on the Water," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 28, Iss. 1, 2007.

²Adiele E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006, p. 183.

³Adiele E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*, London: Longman Group, 1972, p. xiii.

⁴This flows 240 kilometres into the Atlantic Ocean. Its estuary is around 40 kilometres wide, and the river has an annual discharge of 4 cubic kilometres with 26,000 hectares of wetland. The Imo's tributary rivers are the Otamiri and Oramirukwa.

⁵The Anambra River has a length of 210km and a basin area of 7125km². It flows 210 kilometres (130 mi) into River Niger. The flow of the Anambra river is released into the Atlantic through various outlets forming the 25,000-square-kilometre (9,700 sq mi) Niger Delta region.

⁶The river runs south from Egbo past Owerri and through Nekede, Ibiagwa, Eziobodo, Olokwu Umuisi, Mgbirichi and Umuagwo to Ozuzu in Etche, in Rivers State, from where it flows to the Atlantic Ocean. The length of the river from its source to its confluence at Emeabiam with the Uramiriukwa River is 30 kilometres.

⁷See, David Northrup, "The Growth of Trade Among the Igbo Before 1800," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 18, 1977. See also, A. E. Afigbo, "Precolonial Trade Links Between Southeastern Nigeria and the Benue Valley," *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 4, 1977.

⁸See, David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, London: Oxford University Press, 1978.

⁹A. E. Afigbo, *The Igbo and their Neighbours*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1987.

¹⁰Paul Shemella, "Assessing Maritime Governance," in Paul Shemella (ed.), *Global Responses to Maritime Violence: Cooperation and Collective Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016, pp. 90-91.

¹¹IMO MSC.1/Circ.1343, amendments to the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual, May 24, 2010, International Maritime Organization, Regulatory Guidance.

¹²Timothy J. Doorey, "Maritime Domain Awareness," in Paul Shemella (ed.), *Global Responses to Maritime Violence: Cooperation and Collective Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016, pp. 125-126.

¹³See, Chukwuma Osakwe, Otoabasi Akpan and Ubong Essien Umoh, "Globalisation and 'Small Wars' in Africa: The Case of Niger Delta, Nigeria," in Usman Tar, Etham Mijah and Moses Tedheke (eds.), *Globalisation in Africa: Perspectives of Development, Security and Environment*, Lanham: Lexington Press, 2016, pp. 115-132.

¹⁴Adiele E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006, p. xi.

¹⁵Adiele E. Afigbo, *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885-1950*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006, p. 23.

¹⁶*ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁷See, Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Press, 1980, p. 278.

¹⁸Barry Buzan, and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

¹⁹David Sobek, Masters of their Domains: The Role of State Capacity in Civil Wars. *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2010, pp. 267-271; De Juan Alexander and Jan H. Pierskalla, "Manpower to Coerce and Co-Opt – State Capacity and Political Violence in Sudan 2006-2010," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2015, pp. 175-199.

²⁰M. Arbetman and J. Kugler (eds.), *Political Capacity and Economic Behaviour* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998; J. D. Fearon and D. D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 75-90; Halvard Buhaug, "Dude, Where is My Conflict? LSG, Relative Strength, and the Location of Civil War," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. Vol. 27, No. 2, 2010, pp. 107-128; Halvard Buhaug, "Rebel Capability and

Rebel Objective in Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2006, pp. 691-708.

²¹Michelle Benson and Jack Kugler, "Power Parity, Democracy and the Severity of Internal Violence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1998, pp. 196-209.

²²Karl R. DeRouen and David Sobek, "The Dynamics of Civil War Duration and Outcome," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2004, pp. 303-320.

²³Cullen S. Hendrix, "Measuring State Capacity: Theoretical and Empirical Implications for the Study of Civil Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2010, pp. 273-285; A. Braithwaite, "Resisting Infection: How State Capacity Conditions Conflict Contagion," *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(3), 2010, pp. 311-319; Otoabasi Akpan, "Triangulating the Web: Oil, State Capacity and Nigeria's Quest for Sustained Regional Leadership," *South South Journal of Culture and Development*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp.112-138.

²⁴P. Engelbert, *State, Legitimacy and Development in Africa*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

²⁵J. D. Fearon and D. D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, 2003, pp. 75-90

²⁶David Sobek, "Masters of their Domains: The Role of State Capacity in Civil Wars," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2010, pp. 267-271.

²⁷Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Press, 1980, p. 275.

²⁸Wendell Phillips speaking to members of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society on January 28, 1852.

²⁹Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

³⁰David Cortright, Kristen Wall and Conor Seyle, *Governance, Democracy and Peace: How State Capacity and Regime Type Influence the Prospects for War and Peace*, Broomfield: One Earth Future Foundation, 2013, p. 10.

³¹McBride, Milante and Skaperdas, "Peace and War with Endogenous State Capacity," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 2011, p. 452.

³²Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense*, New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

³³J. N. Markowitz, and C. J. Fariss, "Going the Distance: The Price of Projecting Power," *International Interactions*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2013, pp. 119–143.

³⁴ Barry M. Blechman, and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1978.

³⁵ Timothy J. Doorey, "Maritime Domain Awareness," in Paul Shemella (ed.), *Global Responses to Maritime Violence: Cooperation and Collective Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016, p. 124.