Security is like oxygen—you tend not to notice it until you begin to lose it, but once that occurs there is nothing else that you will think about.¹

One would suppose that spending 36 percent of the entire world’s military budget would keep a nation secure from a missile attack on its iconic symbols of commercial and military power; but one would be wrong. On 11 September 2001, nineteen young men, all but four being citizens of one of its trusted allies, armed only with dollar-store utility knives and dysfunctional ideology, did just that; turning four commercial airliners into guided weapons, killing almost 3,000 people, and triggering events which no one could have foreseen. This is not to say that military expenditure is a waste—far from it—but it is a vivid reminder that security is not just a problem for military, police and intelligence professionals.

Security is not the same as defense; that is, the capability to resist an attack. Rather, security is a state of being; confidence in freedom from danger or fear. Defense is part of the security equation and is, indeed, primarily a military and constabulary issue, but security is a broader, collective responsibility. What, then, is the place of maritime defense forces—navies—in ocean governance?

**Armed Conflict: Inconvenient Truths**

Unpalatable as it may sound to safe, secure, and idealistic ears, the core function of a navy is its ability to fight. Of course, warships can, and do, deliver humanitarian aid and contribute to scientific research. Submarines can, and do, track criminals covertly and catch illegal fishing in the act. But while warships

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¹ J. Nye, “The Case for Deep Engagement,” *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 4 (July/August 1995): 90–120, 96.
can do such peaceful things, other government vessels cannot, for example, escort merchant ships safely through conflict zones, clear naval mines, or remove the threat of a submarine poised to launch a nuclear-tipped missile ashore. Nonetheless, possessing specialized combat capabilities does not mean a desire to use them. No responsible firefighter yearns for a disastrous mass-casualty fire, but still spends a lot of time preparing for one. No responsible police officer aspires to a life-threatening shoot-out with a criminal, but is still appropriately equipped and trained. Similarly, no responsible sailor aspires to war at sea with its deadly implications and inevitable unintended consequences. But wishful thinking will not make the world safer. “Virtuous motives, trammelled by inertia and timidity,” said Winston Churchill, “are no match for armed and resolute wickedness.”

**Disarmament Myth and Experience**

Informed advocates of naval disarmament are rare these days, not least because it has been tried before with notable lack of success. Far from making the ocean more secure, a decade of negotiations in Washington, Geneva and London following World War One served, if anything, to encourage warship construction to reach negotiated ceilings, and to hasten development of aircraft carriers to compensate for restrictions on battleships. The former head of the League of Nations Disarmament Commission later observed that “nations don’t distrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they distrust each other.”2 This suggests a potential contribution which the international, multidisciplinary ocean governance community can make in building trust, enhancing mutual understanding, and perhaps reducing the risk of armed conflict.

**The Rule (and Role) of Law**

Unsurprisingly, attempts to legislate violence out of existence have yet to be successful, but at least contemporary international law no longer condones war as a legitimate instrument of foreign policy, and the value of more than a century’s evolution of international humanitarian law on the conduct of military operations and treatment of person should not be underestimated. Today all nations at least pay lip-service to the United Nations Charter provisions that “that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest” and be limited to the “inherent right of individual or collective self-defence.” As with any system there are violators, often attempting to justify aggression as self-defence, but we do not abandon laws and governance institutions simply

2 S. de Madariaga, *Morning Without Noon: Memoirs* (Saxon House, 1974), 48.
because some people abuse them. As a former Secretary-General observed, “the United Nations was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell.”

The centrality of our admittedly imperfect body of international law is precisely why responding to the 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks by declaring a so-called ‘Global War on Terrorism’ (with its unlovely acronym ‘GWOT’) was so misguided. Elevating a fringe non-government organization to the status of an enemy state played directly into the narrative of criminals from a culture that prizes honor and status. Small wonder that Al-Qaeda in Iraq spawned the preposterous pretensions of a so-called ‘Islamic State’ that is neither Islamic nor a state. Equally disturbingly, leaders of some otherwise advanced nations are now resurrecting retrograde notions like ‘great powers’ and ‘spheres of influence’. Clearly this is no time for complacently taking security for granted.

**Terrorism**

Terrorism is not warfare: it violates every norm of the international law of armed conflict. Rather, it is a law-enforcement issue; albeit one in which armies, navies, and air forces have significant roles to play at the international level. It might equally well be approached as a public mental health issue because, in the words of one analyst, “terrorism is not an activity that attracts the well-adjusted.” No matter what the metaphor, terrorism, like disease, cannot be managed by focusing on symptoms while ignoring causes.

Despite dramatic headlines—which is precisely its objective—terrorism remains a small threat on a global scale compared with poverty, ignorance, inequality, and climate change. Whereas the official death toll from the 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks was 2,996, the US Institute of Medicine reported a year later that 18,000 Americans were dying annually from lack of health insurance—that represents six 9/11s. Noting that two world wars and eighty million deaths in the twentieth century were triggered by an assassination in Sarajevo, Ronald Wright observes that the “first lesson of 1914 is the risk of overreacting to terrorism.” We must remain level-headed, cleansing the contaminants of injustice, inequality, and ignorance from the soil in which the roots of terrorism grow, rather than simply lopping off noxious shoots whenever they sprout.

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3 Address by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld at University of California Convocation, Berkeley, California, Thursday, May 13, 1954, at 10:00 a.m. (Pacific Coast Time).
4 B.M. Jenkins, quoted in D. Saunders, “When Troubled Young Men Turn to Terror, Is It Ideology or Pathology?,” The Globe and Mail, 24 October 2014.
5 D. Gardiner, Risk (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2008), 331.
6 R. Wright, What is America? A Short History of the New World Order (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 180.
Comprehensive Maritime Security

The 1987 Brundtland Report (the origin of contemporary ‘sustainable development’ policies) suggested that “a comprehensive approach to international and national security must transcend the traditional emphasis on military power and armed competition.” ‘Comprehensive’, according to Elisabeth Mann Borgese, extends “from the local level of the coastal community through the levels of provincial and national governance to regional and global levels.” While comprehensive security policy may originate at the higher levels, it must be grounded locally, where potential trouble-makers live, are educated and work. What, then, might the ocean and coastal governance community contribute?

Collegiality

Compartmentalization of professional cultures is a bane of ocean and coastal governance. Navies, for example (at least in democratic countries) are not secretive competitors for a disproportionate share of scarce resources; they are one of many elements of national governance capability. Navies have three broad functions. Defense is obvious, and the diplomatic roles of warships are generally well understood, whether as floating embassies during port visits abroad or demonstrating presence or resolve in waters of interest to their governments. The third function is much more diverse, however, and can best be described as supporting other government departments. This can include all of the topics discussed in this book: law enforcement; fisheries patrol; humanitarian relief and disaster response; search and rescue; support to marine science; and so forth. In the latter case, examples have ranged from scientific research by submarines under arctic ice, to post-Cold War use of the once highly classified SOSUS (Sound Surveillance System) to track whales, detect illegal fishing, and monitor underwater seismic events. All stakeholders in ocean and coastal governance need to understand each other, work together, and strive for common goals. The ocean governance whole thus becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Engagement

In his book Why Nations Go to War, John Stoessinger identified a number of factors, chief among them that “the beginning of each war is a misperception.

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7 World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), c 11, s. III-4.
8 E. Mann Borgese, The Oceanic Circle (Tokyo: UN University Press, 1998), 133.
or accident.” Unfortunately, in an age of weapons of mass destruction and hair-trigger response, we can no longer afford such luxuries. At least twice during the Cold War, only a judgment call by a relatively junior officer prevented a nuclear exchange, and only sheer luck prevented several disastrous nuclear weapons accidents.10

Our greatest enemies are therefore not so much other nations (or, more precisely, the governments of other nations) as misunderstanding, miscommunication and misperception; all of which marine scientists, scholars, environmentalists, educators and practical mariners are well equipped to reduce. Scientific dialogue brings people from even hostile states together as individuals. Environmental issues span human boundaries which are irrelevant to fish, winds, and currents. Navies and coast guards build confidence through joint operations, dialogue, or at very least agreements to prevent unintended incidents. Even retired officers, diplomats, and policy-makers contribute discreetly to confidence and co-operation through what is known as ‘Track Two’ diplomacy. The ocean transcends boundaries; so does ocean governance.

Affinity

There is evidence that our instinct to divide humanity into ‘us’ versus ‘them’ is genetically ingrained. But while a tribal mentality may explain, it does not excuse letting such thinking influence policy. It may have been appropriate when a few million primitive hunter-gatherers roamed the planet, but is dysfunctional when more than seven billion individuals share the globe, a tiny minority of which is able to exterminate most, if not all the others. The idea that ‘we’ are a group of unique individuals, while ‘they’ are a homogeneous mass with common faults is simply nonsense. Effective global governance cannot be based on denigrating or demonizing others based solely on lines drawn on maps, religion, race, ideology or any other generalization. The crew of Spaceship Earth needs to stop arguing about who is best, or who is responsible for letting the oceanic life-support system degenerate, and start thinking like global citizens. The maritime community is better placed than most to set the example.

Conclusion

Generations in the developed world have enjoyed unprecedented affluence, safety, and security since the end of World War Two, and even most of the

9 J.G. Stoessinger, *Why Nations Go to War* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 260.
10 For example, see E. Schlosser, *Command and Control* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).
world’s poorest societies are materially better off in absolute terms, if not relatively. But it is by no means certain this trend will continue. At the moment, the military threat to security is not so much inter-state war as localized conflict, along with the privatized violence lumped under the label of terrorism. Today, our enemies are not so much hostile states as the risks of misunderstanding, miscommunication, and misjudgment. Our physical security cannot be taken for granted, and is a collective responsibility in which we all have a role to play. It can never be absolute or guaranteed, but the risks can certainly be reduced and mitigated. To give Ronald Wright the last word, “If we fail—if we blow up or degrade the biosphere so it can no longer sustain us—nature will merely shrug and conclude that letting apes run the laboratory was fun for a while but in the end a bad idea.”

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11 R. Wright, *A Short History of Progress* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 2004), 31.