Cities and the Sea
The Urban Role in Maritime Security

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Abstract: In this article, the authors explore the role cities play in maritime security. Urban centers have a complicated relationship with the maritime space. On the one hand, cities are major contributors to insecurity along their maritime borders, exacerbating issues from human trafficking to illegal fishing. On the other hand, cities are increasingly at the center of international consensus-building and problem-solving forums that are producing results even as nations fail to come to agreement on similar challenges. As the world returns to an emphasis on great power competition, cities offer a complementary set of actors and venues in the global arena by which to pursue greater international stability and security.

Keywords: maritime security, cities, urbanization, megacity, piracy

The city and the sea are intertwined instruments and icons of globalization. It is no coincidence that the principles that have long defined networks of seaborne commerce—multiculturalism, economic dynamism, and ideological diversity—are the same notions we associate with urbanites today. And just as cosmopolitan, littoral cities have emerged, in part, from global trade and exchange, so too do they now face the transnational threats unique to this particular era of globalization. As a result of the dynamic relationship be-

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tween cities and the sea, municipal and national governments should consider the role of cities and urban leaders in securing maritime spaces.

The call for this assessment may seem at odds with the current emphasis on great power competition. Indeed, the Pentagon's latest *National Defense Strategy* clearly outlines that the DOD is rebalancing to place deterring (and, if need be, winning) near-peer interstate conflict ahead of the less conventional threats the DOD has addressed since 11 September 2001 (9/11). Much of this rebalancing is warranted—great powers are the only states with the capacity to existentially threaten the United States, while spoilers or rogue regimes remain threats to U.S. interests (in a more limited fashion).[1] Yet, even in this emerging world dynamic, a parallel international force is rising economically, socially, and politically, if not militarily—the city.

As we will explore in this article, cities are rapidly becoming units of action on the global stage. They advocate for social, political, and economic agendas at international forums. They sometimes pursue agendas out of step with their parent government. And, increasingly, cities are home to complicated security dynamics. The tools and tactics the United States cultivates to deter (or defeat) Russia or China do not necessarily reflect those needed to operate in a city. Relatedly, as we will explore in this article, the very actors that the United States would need to engage with to secure littoral cities are wholly different from those involved in great power conflict. Even as the United States—and indeed, the global community—prepares for a reorientation toward a more competitive state environment, ignoring the role of cities as both partners in security and locations of potential conflict is ill-advised. In an era of great power politics, after all, they provide both the opportunity for influence and, even as tensions rise, sites for collective action.

Cities as Hubs for Illicit Trade

As with so many urban issues, the challenges of the littoral city are inextricably linked to opportunities. Consider the importance of seaborne trade to global cities. More than 90 percent of legal goods move by sea, including nearly one-half of all petroleum.[2] At the same time, however, global trade generates its own urban instability. Counterfeit products from fake prescription medications to cigarettes are in high demand in global cities and are often moved by maritime routes. Forced laborers and sex workers are trafficked in cargo containers or fishing trawlers to meet growing demands in coastal cities. In short, if cities are the engines of global commerce, they will likewise be increasingly confronted by the role their maritime borders play in facilitating demand for products, licit and illicit alike.

Illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU) fishing offers a stark example. Rising populations and wealth concentrated in developing cities, particularly in

Asia and Africa, have driven up demand for fish. This demand is often met by illegal and unsustainable practices that degrade fish stocks. Urbanization plays an important role in this degradation both through supply-chain facilitation and market demand. Growing cities often come with improved logistics and infrastructure, providing a suitable cold chain to support the trade in perishable products like fish and animal protein.[3] Meanwhile, urbanization also manifests changes in dietary patterns compared to rural regions of the same country. Cheaper, more diverse food options arising in part from a more sophisticated urban logistics network results in diets that are higher in animal protein consumption, including fish, than traditional rural diets.[4] Whereas, in the 1960s, average per capita fish consumption was slightly less than 10 kilograms, that figure has today more than doubled.[5] Pollution and urban runoff further damage local fish stocks and diminish total available marine resources. For those reasons, IUU fishing has caught increased attention from senior national security officials. Former Supreme Allied Commander Admiral James G. Stavridis, for example, has noted the potential for global fishing wars, especially in Asia, an issue that may assume new risk and relevance in an era of great power rivalry. Congress, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, also asked the U.S. Navy to address IUU fishing as part of its portfolio of security challenges.[6] Why all this attention on fish? Most directly, IUU fishing jeopardizes food security for the nearly 1 billion people who rely on fish as their primary source of protein.[7] Moreover, the global export value of the fishing industry approaches $150 billion annually, meaning more than 56 million people rely on sustainable fishing as a means of employment.[8]

Lagos, Nigeria, offers an example of how these trends collide in an urban setting. The city is vulnerable to a region-wide food-security dilemma. In a part of the world where more than half of protein consumption comes from fish, and the industry is worth upward of U.S. $20 billion and is one of the largest non-oil related sources of rent (i.e., sources of income), one Chatham House report refers to IUU fishing in the Gulf of Guinea as "probably far more important in West Africa than piracy."[9] Overfishing presents risks to the food security of those most vulnerable in a growing city and to those who depend on the industry for income. And while IUU fishing occurs across the region and cannot be tied to any one city, Lagos remains a port of entry for illegally fished products and therefore a substantial employment and agricultural benefactor of the trade. As the hub of West Africa's economy, though, Lagos is also particularly damaged by the economic losses from IUU fishing. One source estimates the total loss in dollars to Nigeria's economy during a five-year period as between $300 and $400 billion.[10] Oil spills in Nigeria only exacerbate these effects.[11]

IUU fishing also has long been identified as a precursor to other maritime crimes, such as piracy, as was argued with the rise of Somali piracy in the

1990s.[12] In that instance, one interpretation of the rise of Somali piracy held that toxic dumping and overfishing by foreign interests drove artisanal fishermen from traditional waters. As a source of income and food dissolved, the fishermen increasingly turned to policing their waters themselves, which over time warped into the rampant piracy witnessed off the Horn of Africa. As with any criminal endeavor, IUU fishing attracts organized crime—groups that, as a rule, diversify their criminal activities to build both growth and resilience.[13] It is no surprise, therefore, that there remains a longstanding, self-perpetuating relationship between IUU fishing and human trafficking.[14] As documented by the International Labour Organization and the Associated Press, a growing demand for seafood is often met by the hands of forced laborers and vulnerable migrants.[15]

Human trafficking also offers another insightful example of the relationship between urbanization and maritime security. Cities are hubs for human trafficking and smuggling. Demand for labor in industries like construction, facilitated by the lure of better financial prospects, lubricates the flow of unskilled rural laborers to cities around the world. Many, upon arrival, find themselves deep in debt and forced to repay exorbitant travel fees and costs of room and board. Meanwhile, the rise in disposable incomes that often comes with urbanization can drive up demand for sex trafficking. Women and girls face particularly high risk factors and comprise a majority of trafficking victims, who are then redirected in existing irregular migration flows—they are often enticed to leave home in search of better work—to sustain the massive demand for forced sexual exploitation.[16] The rise of an urban middle class also precipitates a desire for domestic labor. Houseworkers often face the same obstacles as forced laborers in other sectors—unreasonable travel fees, charges for room and board, and confiscated passports.

Bangkok is an archetype of the convergence of these trafficking trends. Thailand has attracted an estimated 4 million non-native migrants, most of them arriving irregularly. Those 4 million migrants are at high risk of trafficking from the very beginning of their travels. While there are many overland routes, travel by sea remains a well-worn path. Some migrants from Cambodia, for example, first travel by boat to Malaysia before continuing on to Thailand overland.[17] Those arriving from Laos and Myanmar are perhaps most likely to take the arduous journey by boat, either navigating local rivers or coming indirectly through the Andaman Sea.

Locations of first entry vary, but Bangkok is often the ultimate destination because large cities offer higher potential salaries. According to the United Nations (UN), 40 percent of all migrants live in or near Bangkok. At the most extreme count, nearly one-quarter of those migrants (1 million people) may be victims of trafficking.[18] Bangkok's thriving tourist industry is a particular

driver both of irregular migration and subsequent human trafficking. Cambodian, Laotian, and Burmese children are frequently trafficked to Bangkok and serve as beggars in tourist neighborhoods.[19] Additionally, Bangkok has become infamous as an international capital for sexual exploitation. The sea plays a vital role in facilitating the flow of people from rural communities to growing cities. Once there, many migrants reap the benefits of Bangkok's dynamic economy, while others endure hardship and a violation of basic human rights.

The Governance and Misgovernance of Cities

Rapid rates of urbanization amplify transnational challenges while giving rise to new networks and centers of power, thus providing new opportunities for political, economic, and security relationships and influence. The highest rates of urban growth are frequently found in the global south, in cities with limited capacity to keep pace with changing conditions. Dhaka, Bangladesh, has grown by as much as 5,400 percent during the last 65 years.[20] If New York City had grown at the same pace, its population would now be nearing 700 million.[21] When the sheer scale of residents outweighs a municipality's capacity to govern, some cities may lose control of some or all of the inhabitants they purport to administer. Richard J. Norton referred to these as *feral cities*, or places where the government "has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city's boundaries yet remains a functioning actor in the greater international system."[22] Many such cities are a mishmash of formal and informal governance, with some pockets governed by informal organizations and actors rather than government entities. Some such informal organizations are benign, even beneficial, for inhabitants. Others are more nefarious in intent and consequence. Poorly supported urban communities can fall victim to the predations of pirates, drug cartels, insurgents, and gangs—all of whom may leverage their access to the sea to move people and products with impunity.

Kingston, Jamaica, as profiled in David Kilcullen's *Out of the Mountains*, provides an extreme example of a feral pocket. In the case of the Tivoli Gardens neighborhood, the community fell subject to a criminal group enriched by narcotics trafficking (often by maritime means), the Shower Posse, led by Christopher Coke.[23] Coke's organization had insinuated itself as the de facto political arbiter and police force in his community, buying acquiescence though a combination of patronage (fueled by illicit enterprises), violence, and rule setting.[24] When Jamaica faced pressure to arrest Coke in 2010, he had become so entrenched that the operation looked like a military assault. Some took up arms to defend him, while many cowered under an assault that briefly sent Jamaica into a state of emergency.[25] Of course, Kingston is not Mogadishu, Somalia. And yet, "gang enclaves operated as autonomous mini-states" there, fed by the proceeds of maritime insecurity.[26] Kingston typifies the feral pocket and

serves as a cautionary extreme for the urban consequences of instability at sea.

Finally, while transnational criminal groups often work intentionally under the radar, other organizations use any vacuum in local territorial control to wreak havoc. Though overt utilization of the seas by terrorists remains rare, terrorists and insurgents have (in echoes of the 2008 Mumbai assault) used the sea as a space for maneuver in attacks in Tunisia (2015), Egypt (2016), and Côte d'Ivoire (2016).[27] Pointedly, attacks are often on seaside hotels, with deleterious effects for the tourism industries upon which many municipal and national economies rely. Similar concerns about the consequences of violence on tourism have resulted in major diplomatic efforts in other regions, such as the Caribbean, where conflicts between traffickers and police in countries like Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago have triggered travel alerts by Western nations.[28] Such travel advisories, issued by countries upon which coastal cities rely for tourism, have precipitated national-level responses, with special delegations dispatched to resolve the crisis.[29]

The urban relationship with the maritime sphere is dynamic; cities precipitate demands that are often met at the expense of, or via, the seas. Urban financial opportunities and demand for cheap labor precipitate the smuggling and trafficking of people by sea, while demand for counterfeit products, narcotics, and weapons are satiated in part by illicit seaborne deliveries. Cities are consumers of goods extracted from the sea, while such consumption places both food stocks and local industries at risk. Pollution further exacerbates the degradation of coastal communities and food security. Finally, cities remain targets for extremists, who may leverage the sea as a space for maneuver, threatening lives and the sustainability of regional tourist economies.

As cities in the global south continue to grow and thrive, how cities manage maritime insecurity, and the partners they look to help them in doing so, will have ramifications far beyond city lines. The return to great power politics does not negate these challenges. To the contrary, it heightens the importance, as we will later outline, of collaboration between cities on shared challenges, offering as they do the opportunity for policy exchange across borders and transnational collaboration despite new or renewed international tension. Cities offer a final challenge, this one predominantly bureaucratic in nature: the U.S. national security processes and apparatuses are not designed with cities in mind. Ensuring that the obstacles and opportunities unique to cities are identified and pursued will require that existing institutions make room for voices at the urban level of analysis. The National Security Council (NSC), DOD, Department of State, and relevant intelligence agencies could consider integrating urban expertise into their policy processes, combatant commands, and regional or thematic offices to serve as internal advocates for tracking urban trends with security relevance.[30] That same expertise should be applied to the policies, plans, and

strategies developed by these offices to ensure that issues of national significance are infused with urban knowledge where relevant.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks produced a paradigm shift in the way the nation negotiated the divide between homeland security and national defense. Domestic intelligence agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and foreign collection enterprises such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA) were directed to find better ways to cooperate. The NSA was given a chair on the Homeland Security Council. An entire cabinet bureaucracy, the Department of Homeland Security, was stood up to coordinate the homeland effort. The rise of cities may not require such a dramatic set of bureaucratic changes, but the fundamental lesson about deconstructing barriers is instructive. Just as homeland security needed more empowered and elevated voices, so too should the urban element garner more prominence across the U.S. interagency to cooperate with the unique challenges that large cities face in an increasingly connected and globalized world.

What Can Be Done?

As a result of the dynamic relationship between cities and the sea, all levels of government and intergovernmental bodies should consider the role of urban leaders in securing the maritime space. Solutions and policies must be developed and deployed at the municipal, national, regional, and international levels.[31] Ideally, those solutions and policies would also be aligned vertically, with international norms and national polices enabling local solutions. In reality, approaches are often more scattershot and stove piped, with cities, national governments, and international organizations developing different approaches with varied timelines. Nonetheless, quite a few general approaches have been developed for meeting global challenges at the municipal level that can be tailored to urban maritime security initiatives.

First, international organizations will need to improve their program delivery and support for member states around this nexus. The Organization for Security Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is expanding its work around city security—this must include a littoral focus. As the UN builds out urban counterterrorism programs in cities like Marawi, Philippines, in 2018, they must also include a focus on the sea. UN Habitat, which convenes the World Urban Forum, the world's largest biannual gathering on city issues, must ensure that issues around maritime security feature on the agenda for designers, sustainability directors, and development experts who bring urban-focused skill sets to what are now global challenges.

Second, national governments are going to have to continue to adapt to operating in challenging urban environments, even as other theaters and threats regain prominence. The approach to urban security developed during the Iraq

War was largely built around landlocked cities.[32] At the 2017 Future of War Conference, U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Mark A. Milley noted that in the future we must expect war to be urban (and, we would add, coastal). General Milley noted, "We're going to have to optimize the army for urban warfare."[33] In the decades to come, however, the urban terrain will also increasingly be maritime. In 2017, the chief of naval operations noted in his white paper "The Future Navy" the importance of urbanization in the future security environment but did not explore the implications of this phenomena.[34] Likewise, a 2014 Army report from the chief of staff of the Army's Strategic Studies Group argues that "it is highly likely that the megacities will be the strategic key terrain in any future crisis that requires U.S. military intervention."[35] Already, about one-half of the people in the world live within walking distance (30 miles) of a coast, and approximately 75 percent of big cities are coastal.[36]And the numbers will not stop growing anytime soon; right now, 1.5 million people migrate to a city every week.[37]

Additionally, of course, the force most likely to operate in a coastal megacity is the Marine Corps. Brigadier General Julian D. Alford, then-commander of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, noted in 2015 that despite the growing likelihood of urban (specifically, megacity) operations in the future, his training did not reflect a deep preparation for such combat: "I've trained in every environment, jungle, the desert, the mountains, cold weather, but I've never really trained well in an urban environment . . . the first time I ever dropped a bomb, shot a rocket, threw a grenade, killed a person was for real in an urban environment. . . .That should never happen again."[38] Marine Corps Commandant General Robert B. Neller noted, however, that simulating such an environment is exceedingly complicated: "We can't afford to go out and build a 20-story skyscraper at Twentynine Palms [, California,] or stack shipping containers that high, we are just not going to do that."[39] And even if we could, operating in a city, especially a megacity, is not only a matter of the built environment, but of understanding the complex, minute dynamics that move a city. Understanding a city's disposition—its propensity to act, its character, as Keller Easterling has written—is a matter well beyond replicating its buildings. This is a challenge not only of material but of knowledge.[40] The Army's strategic studies report concludes:

> A gap exists in the Army's doctrinal understanding of large cities. Moreover, megacities are not treated as units of analysis for study and intelligence collection or featured in planning scenarios. The Army, and the DoD community more broadly, neither understands nor prepares for these environments.[41]

Preparing to operate in cities (or, ideally, avoiding doing so) necessitates build-

ing a complete picture of their relationship to threats in all domains, including the sea. Only then can we begin improving force structure planning or refining intelligence analysis efforts.

Critically, cities can and must take action themselves. Indeed, cities are increasingly taking action on transnational challenges, with many efforts coordinated and international. Work in the climate change space is the most advanced and instructive. Backed by significant philanthropies and organized around networks (e.g., C40 Cities, the Global Covenant of Mayors, Local Governments for Sustainability, United Cities and Local Governments, and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network), cities are collectively committing to action to mitigate carbon emissions, at times superseding nations' inaction or ineffective coordination, at others contributing to ongoing efforts by states.[42] Networks amplify the collective voice of mayors and enable and support policy learning, exchange, and innovation. And the model is already adapting to an expanded set of challenges. C40 Cities, for example, has subnetworks focused on a range of issues, including food security and energy. Cities have also acted together to apply pressure and share policy perspective at international gatherings. Mayors were highly visible at the climate Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations in Paris in 2015, as well as at subsequent UNFCCC meetings in Marrakesh, Morocco, in 2016 and Bonn, Germany, in 2017.

There is similar such work in early stages in the security space. Some of this is being done by cities in isolation, such as the longstanding deployment of intelligence officials by New York City to nearly a dozen countries. Or, as in the climate space, by the development of networks like the Strong Cities Network (SCN). The SCN has developed an updated version of "twinning" that links cities with similar violent extremism dynamics that enables cities to access policy solutions from around the world. These initiatives are a good start, but cities—backed by national governments—should explore how they can collaborate and share learning on maritime security issues more directly using the models they already have on hand.

Finally, the return of great power politics does not mean the urban arena is any less relevant—indeed, it should encourage us to explore in greater depth the interaction between urban and national issues. The Sister Cities program, for example, though focused on cultural exchange and people-to-people diplomacy, was in part a product of great power tensions. While recognizing the primacy of national governments on many security issues, cities, and in particular their practitioner experts, can and have maintained communication on shared challenges during periods of tension. Even as the 2017 G20 in Germany and 2018 G7 in Canada failed to produce consensus, for example, the world's largest and

most influential cities gathered together in advance of the 2018 Argentina G20 to forge consensus around many global challenges.[43] This urban cooperation can even serve as a means of relieving tensions that accumulate on the national level as the world returns to heightened rhetoric on great power competition.

Conclusion

Maritime security has a distinctly urban manifestation. Cities benefit from the sea even as the conditions of urbanization facilitate maritime instability. From demand for protein satiated in part by illegal fishing to a demand for labor met in part by human trafficking, cities face important imperatives to be partners in securing maritime spaces. A path for how cities can go about doing so is already charted in the climate sphere, where cities have demonstrated the ability and willingness to engage on issues of global consequence at a grassroots level. More is required on this effort in the security arena, where less traditional challenges of human security in particular (e.g., trafficking in persons and forced labor) warrant more serious attention. Meanwhile, cities require support from national leaders. Politicians and policy makers have a responsibility to address, not just leverage, the urban relationship with maritime security. As great power politics return, nations will have to decide whether to engage cities as competitive sites for influence or as locales (and partners) for collective action on shared challenges. Doing so will help safeguard cities against the worst manifestations of disorder, spaces governed by malicious nonstate actors, while encouraging analyst policy makers to think more critically about how to both fight and avoid fighting in such tumultuous terrain.

Notes

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