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African Navies

This edited volume focuses on aspects of the understudied theme of African sea-power, including African navies and the engagement of non-African navies with the continent.

Africa possesses 48,000 kilometers of coastline, comprising 38 out of 54 of the continent's states and several strategic choke points for international shipping, such as the Suez Canal, the Gulf of Aden and the Cape of Good Hope. Nevertheless, post-colonial Africa's small navies and their relations with the navies of external powers have not received much scholarly attention. Focusing on sub-Saharan Africa, this collection attempts to address this neglect and stimulate further research by offering original chapters related to historical and contemporary themes around Africa's navies. The historical chapters cover the origin of the Tanzanian, Ethiopian, Nigerian and Ghana navies during the era of decolonization and the Cold War, the asymmetrical naval campaign fought during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), and the activities of the Soviet Navy in supporting African states and movements fighting lingering colonialism and white supremacy during the 1970s and 1980s. Focusing on the contemporary situation, other chapters discuss the engagement of the Indian Navy with Africa, the potential role of the Angolan and Mozambican navies in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the transformation and development of the post-apartheid South African Navy and the challenges and capabilities of African navies in the early twenty-first century. The book concludes by discussing the question of whether African coastal countries need navies.

This book will be of much interest to students of naval power, strategic studies, African politics and International Relations.

Tim Stapleton is Professor in the Department of History, University of Calgary, Canada. He has held academic positions in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia and Nigeria. His most recent books include *Africa: War and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (2018).

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African Navies

Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

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Timothy Stapleton

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Introduction

Timothy Stapleton

Despite the popularity of topics related to naval history, contemporary navies, and maritime security, African navies as well as their partnerships with non-African navies have received little scholarly attention. The rise of interest in small navies, a category that could arguably include all African navies, has not stimulated much research on the continent's many naval forces.[1] Several excellent works on present-day African maritime security, a subject invigorated by the rise of piracy in African waters during the early twenty-first century, lack historical context.[2] This is not surprising as little research has been done on Africa's naval history except for aspects of ancient North Africa. Among Africa's modern navies, only the South African Navy has generated a significant literature regarding historical and current themes.[3] Several new books on navies and maritime security in the South Atlantic touch on Africa, but as one contributor notes, "Africa usually serves either as a forgotten coast of the Atlantic lake or as an object where interactions occur, mainly determined by extra-regional powers and factions."[4] The aim of this book is to highlight original research on the understudied theme of African navies, historical and contemporary, and to stimulate future work in the field.

Africa's Naval History: An Overview

The state of Africa's modern navies is closely linked to how governments and people on the continent view the ocean. Scholars of maritime affairs often describe today's African states as suffering from "sea blindness" meaning "ignorance of seas or oceans' worth, or lack of insight into the strategic importance of large water masses."[5] This situation seems strange for a continent where 38 out of 54 countries possess a total coastline of 47 000 kilometres on the Atlantic and Indian oceans, and Mediterranean and Red seas. Additionally, and since the early 1980s, many coastal African countries claim relatively large offshore exclusive economic zones (EEZ) including Kenya with 142 000 square kilometres, Senegal with 158 000, Nigeria with 216 000, Ghana with 225 000, Equatorial Guinea with 314 000, Angola with 518 000, Namibia with 562 000, Somalia with 830 000, and South Africa with 1 535 000. Africa's island states have very large EEZs including Seychelles

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with 1 300 000 square kilometres and Madagascar with 1 140 000.[6] Given this geography, modern coastal Africa is the location of numerous human maritime activities involving fishing, port services, merchant shipping, and offshore oil production. For example, in West Africa, 31% of the total population and 51% of the urban population inhabit coastal areas, which also produce 56% of the region's gross domestic product (GDP).[7]

With most of Africa's obvious connection to the ocean, is there something about the continent's history that has led to this "sea blindness?" Is this part of a legacy of Africa's land-based colonial exploitation as some have suggested?[8] Before the European colonial conquest of almost all of Africa in the late nineteenth century, the continent's regions experienced very different maritime and naval histories. It is probably not accidental that Africa's largest and most potent contemporary navies, those of Egypt and Algeria, are based in North Africa, a region with the world's oldest maritime and naval history. Furthermore, and as in ancient times, in modern North Africa's relatively compact Mediterranean milieu, seagoing trade partners and security threats are never far away making naval development a priority. Despite the region's naval heritage, North African navies succumbed to growing Western naval power during the 1800s. The naval history of sub-Saharan Africa is very different. East Africa has a rich maritime history of involvement in Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade, but in pre-colonial times, the region's many divided coastal powers lacked navies, which arrived with the Chinese in the early 1400s and Portuguese, Ottomans, and Omani Arabs in the 1500s. For pre-1500 West and West Central Africa, the most important trade routes went overland or along river systems, and maritime culture on the Atlantic coast remained mostly local with canoe navies emerging along inland waterways. As with East Africa, foreign seafarers arrived along the West and West Central African coast in the 1400s and 1500s, eventually redirecting the thrust of the region's trade from the Sahara to the Atlantic. In this emerging Atlantic World, West African states and societies remained land powers providing exports, mostly enslaved people and eventually raw materials, to Europeans and colonial Americans who dominated the ocean. The arid tip of Southern Africa, where indigenous hunters and herders lacked technology and resources for seafaring, became strategically important from the beginning of European overseas expansion and therefore served as the location of a European settler colony centred on Cape Town as a major port joining the south Atlantic and Indian oceans. As such, European colonial rule in Africa from the late 1800s to around the 1960s reinforced a long trend of maritime and/or naval underdevelopment in most regions. Africa's sea-blindness is not a new thing.

North Africa: The Southern Mediterranean Rim

Forming the southern shore of the Mediterranean Basin, North Africa has an ancient and complex naval history with empires using navies to project power in the region. Around 3500 years ago, and rooted in the Nile's riverine

culture, ancient Egypt founded the world's first known navy using it to facilitate empire building up the eastern Mediterranean coast into what is now Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, and down the Red Sea.[9] Ancient North Africa served as the location of two of the greatest harbours (which were also human-made harbours) of the ancient Mediterranean world; Carthage in Tunisia and Alexandria in Egypt.[10] Founded in the 800s BCE by Phoenician seafarers from today's Lebanon, the city state of Carthage became the dominant maritime and naval power in the western Mediterranean. During the Punic Wars (264–146 BCE), Carthage lost this position to the rising power of Republican Rome that developed its own navy. Once the Romans defeated the Carthaginians on the Mediterranean, particularly in the major naval battle of Ecnomus in 256 BCE, Rome used its navy to transport expeditionary armies to North Africa to conquer Carthage.[11] Securing its maritime trade empire centred on Alexandria, Ptolemaic Egypt became the foremost naval power in the eastern Mediterranean during the 300s and 200s BCE, building some of the largest warships in the ancient world. The defeat of the Egyptian navy of Cleopatra VII at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE enabled the incorporation of Ptolemaic Egypt into the Roman Empire.[12]

Naval warfare featured prominently in the history of Medieval North Africa. During the 600s CE, the Byzantine and Arab navies vied for control of the North African coast. Indeed, the Byzantine naval threat prompted the Arabs to move their capital in Egypt from coastal Alexandria further inland to the head of the Nile Delta where they established Cairo and to shift their main port in Tunisia slightly inland from Carthage to the new site of Tunis. Naval power became central to the Arab conquest and subsequent Islamization of North Africa. In the early 700s, and by employing Egyptian shipbuilders, the Arabs built a new navy at Tunis that seized the remaining Byzantine strongholds in North Africa, dominated the western Mediterranean, and facilitated Arab advances in the Iberian Peninsula.[13] During the 1000s and 1100s, naval power was important for the expansion of the successive Almoravid and Almohad Islamic revitalization movements in western North Africa with the latter challenged by the emerging naval forces of the European Christian Normans who captured ports in the region. In the eastern Mediterranean, naval power enabled the European Christian campaign to take over the Holy Land in the Middle East called the Crusades (1095–1291), and this diminished Muslim naval forces especially the Egyptian Navy. Naval operations during the Crusades included blockades and raids of ports, landing of troops and supplies, and attacks on merchant shipping. Egyptian ruler Salah al-Din attempted to rebuild the Egyptian Navy in the 1170s and 1180s, importing scarce building materials from hostile Christian powers in southern Europe and engaging skilled Moroccan sailors, but inexperienced Egyptian naval personnel contributed to key defeats and loss of ships. Subsequent rulers of Medieval Egypt neglected its navy.[14]

Ottoman expansion from the Middle East across North Africa renewed the importance of naval power in the region from the early 1500s to late

1800s. Normally focused on land warfare, Egypt's Mamluk rulers used assistance from the Ottoman Empire to build a new Egyptian Navy at the start of the 1500s. This force unsuccessfully challenged the Portuguese who were blocking Egypt's trade through the Red Sea and into the Indian Ocean. Later that century, after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, the Ottoman Navy pushed down the Red Sea and entered the Indian Ocean to confront the Portuguese, but this process was delayed by the Ottoman defeat at the decisive 1571 Battle of Lepanto in the Mediterranean. During the 1500s, a series of Ottoman naval commanders extended the Ottoman presence along the North African coast seizing a series of enclaves that defined modern Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Based in North African ports, these Ottoman corsairs preyed on shipping in the Mediterranean and raided into the Atlantic until they were suppressed by navies from Europe and the United States in the early nineteenth century.[15]

During the nineteenth century, the Egyptian Navy formed and reformed several times and finally collapsed. France's brief occupation of Egypt, with French land forces trapped there after the Royal Navy destroyed the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile in 1798, increased European influence in Egypt, and led to several reform efforts including another new navy. Under modernizing ruler Mohammed Ali, Egypt re-established a navy in the 1810s and 1820s using it to project power to Arabia, Syria, and Greece. Since Egypt produced little wood, building materials were imported from elsewhere in the Mediterranean to shipyards in Alexandria. Some vessels were transported in pieces overland to the port of Suez for assembly and launched into the Red Sea. After losing many ships to technologically superior European navies at the 1827 Battle of Navarino during the Greek War of Independence, Mohammed Ali engaged a French naval engineer to oversee the construction of yet another navy with French officers commanding some ships and teaching at a new naval academy. In 1832, the Egyptian navy comprised a dozen ships-of-the-line, the same number of frigates and many smaller vessels that served during the country's conflicts with the main Ottoman Empire resulting in Egypt's semi-autonomous status. However, with Egypt's disastrous participation in the Crimean War (1853–56) and subsequent financial crisis, the Egyptian military including its navy declined during the 1860s and the Ministry of the Navy was closed at a time when the opening of the Suez Canal increased the region's strategic importance for Western navies.[16]

East Africa and the Indian Ocean

Knowledge of East Africa's naval history begins from the 500s to 700s CE when the ancient Christian kingdom of Aksum, located in today's Eritrea and northern Ethiopia, operated a navy on the Red Sea to protect its trade and project power to the Arabian Peninsula. There is sparse evidence relating to the Aksumite navy. Aksum collapsed during the 900s given environmental depletion, local conflicts, and the Muslim conquest of North Africa that severed its

trade contacts up the Red Sea. Subsequently, a new powerful Ethiopian state emerged in the 1100s located further inland and thus without a navy but still connected with Red Sea trade with Egypt.[17]

Further down the East African coast, which forms the western edge of the Indian Ocean rim, the Swahili people developed a maritime culture involving trade with south and east Asia.[18] This Indian Ocean trade system developed because of monsoon winds that facilitated voyages by sailing vessels between Africa and Asia, and the development of transport technology including the lateen sail on Arab dhows and navigation by astrolabe originating from ancient Greece and magnetic compass invented in China. While the Indian Ocean trade was largely conducted by Arab sailors, the Swahili also developed their own design of vessel called "mtepe" with a flexible sewn wooden hull and square sail and used for local transport. East Africa's participation in this economic system was enabled by a coast with numerous natural harbours and resources such as wood for shipbuilding and fresh water and rich agriculture that supported communities. Founding many independent towns along the East African coast, stretching 3200 kilometres from Somalia to Mozambique, the Swahili people became trade intermediaries between African hinterland societies and Arab and south Asian sailors. According to archaeological evidence, from around 100 BCE to 300 CE, farming and iron-using Swahili communities acquired pottery, ceramics, and glassware from Greece, Rome, and Egypt. East Africa's involvement in the Indian Ocean trade increased from around 300 to 1000 CE with the region exporting goods such as gold, ivory, animal hides, and rhinoceros horn in return for textiles, silk, beads, glass, and ceramics from India, Iran, China, and Egypt. Involvement in the Indian Ocean trade spread Islam among Swahili communities creating a shared identity with Arab seafarers. From around 1000 to 1500 CE, the Swahili ports such as Sofala, Kilwa, Zanzibar, and Mombasa experienced a "golden age" importing glassware from Egypt, silk, lacquerware, and porcelain from China, textiles from India, beads from Iran and Sri Lanka, and ceramics from Thailand and Vietnam, and they exported timber to Yemen, ivory to Arabia, and iron, copper, fruit, and grain to India, and cooking ware to the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. Furthermore, enslaved people from the East African interior were exported to Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and south Asia. This rich commercial context attracted visits by the Chinese navy to the East African coast in 1405–06, 1417, and 1421–22, but such voyages halted given policy changes in imperial China.[19]

Before 1500, and despite their reliance on maritime commerce, there was no Swahili navy. The East African hinterland represented the main security concern for Swahili ports prompting them to maintain armies and ally with interior powers. Despite conflict between themselves and a limited pirate threat, the Swahili city states did not build warships and only occasionally mounted imported cannon on ships and protected their towns with simplistic fortifications. Until 1500, the Swahili did not perceive a serious threat from the ocean and their states were too small and divided to form navies.[20]

Without naval power, the fractious Swahili ports quickly succumbed to the Portuguese invasion of the Indian Ocean at the start of the 1500s. Portuguese ships were larger, more manoeuvrable, and better armed than Indian Ocean vessels, and Portuguese bombardment or threats convinced many Swahili ports to pay them tribute. During the early sixteenth century, Portuguese naval forces in the Indian Ocean defeated a series of challenges including by a combined Egyptian, Indian, and Persian fleet at the 1509 Battle of Diu and by the Ottoman navy later in the 1500s. In turn, the Portuguese founded a chain of coastal enclaves and forts along the Indian Ocean rim including the ports of Mozambique and Sofala on the southern East African coast. Continued Ottoman incursions from the Red Sea down the East African coast, which incited Swahili rebellions, prompted the Portuguese to strengthen their hold on the northern portion of the region by building a fort at Mombasa in the 1590s. However, the rising naval power of the Sultanate of Oman on the southern Arabian Peninsula expelled the Portuguese in 1650 and drove them from the northern East Africa coast. In 1698, the Omanis captured the important trade centres of Mombasa and Zanzibar restricting the Portuguese to Mozambican ports.[21] Among pre-colonial East African states, and except for ancient Aksum, perhaps the most powerful navy was the interior kingdom of Buganda's large fleet of war canoes that attempted to control trade on Lake Victoria during the 1800s.[22] East Africa's precolonial coastal societies have a rich maritime history of intercontinental trade but not much naval history of their own.

The Atlantic Coast: West, West Central, and Southwest Africa

Compared to North and East Africa, and despite a long Atlantic coastline, West and West Central Africa had little involvement in ocean-going maritime or naval affairs before the arrival of European seafarers in the 1400s. Although West Africans had long engaged in coastal fishing and trade using small boats, the main economy of the region comprised overland trade exporting goods like gold, kola nuts, animal hides, and enslaved people north across the Sahara Desert to North Africa and beyond. In this context, the Sahara could be compared to an ocean separating West and North Africa traversed by camel caravans comparable to ships and with oases serving as islands. This Trans-Sahara system prompted the growth of vast territorial empires such as Mali in the 1200s and Songhai in the 1400s that controlled and taxed trade routes through Sahelian West Africa. Up until the late 1400s, with the beginnings of an Atlantic economy, the Atlantic Ocean was simply too vast for West Africans to cross and there were no foreign maritime trade partners to attract interest. The claim that the Mali Empire sent a fleet of ships across the Atlantic to the Americas in the 1300s lacks evidence.[23]

The geography of coastal West Africa discouraged the development of ocean-going technology. Since the West African coast comprises long stretches of straight beach, and estuaries were blocked by sandbars and swamps, natural

harbours like Freetown and Dakar are rare. Additionally, the thick coastal forest and historical shortage of transport animals due to tropical disease made it difficult to move large amounts of goods to the coast and there was little reason to do so. Given the way that West Africa was incorporated into the Atlantic economy after around 1500, with the region becoming the primary source of enslaved labour for colonies in the Americans, European and colonial American seafarers dominated the region's maritime economy. Harbour facilities remained scarce in this period as most European or American ships visiting West Africa anchored at points along the coast and conducted trade with local people paddling out in canoes. It was only along the Gold Coast (today's Ghana) that the lure of acquiring gold from the interior Akan prompted early modern Europeans to build coastal fortifications like Elmina with limited port facilities. Much later, during the colonial era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, industrial technology facilitated the construction of new deep-water harbours with breakwaters and moles needed for increasingly large cargo ships. New ports like Cotonou, Port Harcourt, and Takoradi, and expanded ones like Lagos were served by colonial railways penetrating the hinterland extracting raw materials for the world market and delivering an increasing amount of imports.[24]

In terms of West Africa's early modern naval history, European and colonial American sailing ships commanded coastal waters and local powers controlled inland waterways. Non-African "blue water" navies off West Africa periodically bombarded, raided, or seized each other's coastal enclaves or intercepted each other's vessels as part of wider imperial competition. There are many examples of non-African navies seizing Atlantic African ports from each other including Luanda, which a Dutch fleet took from the Portuguese in 1641 only to lose it to a Portuguese-Brazilian fleet in 1648, and Cape Town, which the British captured from the Dutch in 1795 and again in 1806. Simultaneously, West African coastal societies were expert in "brown water" naval warfare using canoes to conduct raids and transport armies around rivers and lagoons. In West African warfare, smaller coastal and riverine powers with canoes and skilled crews often frustrated inland empires like Dahomey or Asante with powerful armies. A prominent example of these West African naval forces was the Niger Delta "canoe house" that represented a trading and fighting unit of around 50 men operating a canoe and led by a successful warrior-merchant. By start of the nineteenth century, Niger Delta trading towns like Bonny and Calabar each comprised over a dozen canoe houses serving as the primary institution for procuring and exporting enslaved people. By the 1840s, the ruler of Abo in the Delta could raise a force of 300 war canoes. Although European ships possessed superior firepower to West African canoes, the former were vulnerable to being overwhelmed by large numbers of the latter when close to the shore.[25]

During the nineteenth century, West Africa's transition from exporting enslaved people to providing raw materials for Western industries led to protracted naval campaigns in the region's waters and the expansion of

colonial coastal enclaves. In 1819, after Britain's abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the end of the Napoleonic wars, Britain founded the West Africa Squadron (or Preventative Squadron) of the Royal Navy comprising six ships based in Freetown. Britain also signed international treaties granting the Royal Navy authority to search and seize possible slaving ships of other powers. Growing to 36 ships, the squadron became more effective during the 1840s because of factors like treaties that prohibited vessels from carrying shackles related to the slave trade, the Royal Navy's employment of fast steam ships, and agreements with some West African rulers to stop exporting enslaved people. During the early 1840s, the West African Squadron acted aggressively blockading and raiding the Spanish slaver enclave of Gallinas in Sierra Leone and the Portuguese slaving bases at Cabinda and Ambriz in northern Angola. Although these operations temporarily slowed the export of West African captives to Brazil, diplomatic and legal issues prompted Britain to refrain from attacking slaving stations of other powers. Subsequently, the squadron focused on African slaving ports such as in 1851 when it bombarded Lagos leading to the replacement of its ruler with another who agreed to stop exporting captives. From 1811 to 1867, the squadron intercepted about 1500 slaving vessels, representing roughly one in five, and recovered around 160 000 out of 2.7 million enslaved people exported from Africa during this period, which cost Britain £7.5 million and the lives of 2000 officers and sailors who died mostly from disease.[26] To be clear, "liberated" Africans taken from captured slaving ships by the Royal Navy were not free and usually landed at the freed slave settlement of Freetown where they became indentured labour for local farmers or were conscripted into the army or navy.[27]

The United States Navy also became active along the coast of nineteenth-century West Africa mounting its own anti-slavery patrols. After limited naval actions against slavers from 1818 to 1821, the US Navy's anti-slavery patrols stopped for two decades over American disapproval of British seizure of American vessels and legal actions by slavers. In 1843, because of pressure from American abolitionists and diplomacy with Britain, the US Navy established its Africa Squadron. Initially, the small size of the squadron and its base at Cape Verde, far from the busiest slave ports south of the equator, limited its effectiveness. The end of the Mexican American War in 1848 and the dismissal of slaver litigation prompted the US Africa Squadron to cooperate with the Royal Navy and shift operations south of the equator founding a new headquarters at Luanda in 1859. Over the next two years, and with four new steam ships, the squadron seized 21 slaving vessels of its total of 36. Although the squadron made a limited impact on the slave trade and it dissolved in 1861 at the start of the US Civil War, it represented the first major American military operation in support of liberal ideals. Concurrently, the US Navy played a critical role in the 1821 creation of Liberia as a settlement of free African Americans on the West African coast. A republic from 1847, Liberia expanded conquering indigenous communities with occasional

support from American warships that also discouraged British and French intrusion.[28]

While Western navies continued to dominate African territorial waters during the nineteenth century, sailors recruited from coastal Africa became increasingly important for European and American naval vessels. The Kru people of Liberia, formerly middlemen in the West African slave trade, specialized as cheap labour on foreign ships providing local knowledge, small boating skills, and resistance to tropical disease. Kru sailors proved essential to the British and American naval campaigns against the West African slave trade, and during the late nineteenth century, they crewed Royal Navy ships countering the slave trade in East African waters. Known as Kroomen or Krumen, these sailors became an institution on the vessels of the Royal Navy well into the twentieth century, and this resulted in a Kru diaspora across the ports of Atlantic Africa including Freetown, Lagos, and Cape Town and in the Caribbean. In the Indian Ocean, Muslim sailors called "seedies" recruited from the Swahili coast and islands played a similar role on merchant and naval vessels. Just as colonial Europeans saw specific African ethnic groups as "martial tribes" producing natural soldiers, Royal Navy officers perceived some coastal African peoples as natural sailors.[29]

Along Southern Africa's arid Atlantic coast, today's Namibia and the Cape region of South Africa, indigenous hunter-gatherers and herders utilized the shoreline fishing and searching for shellfish and other food sources from earliest times but lacked the resources and technology to venture out to the sea. From the voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1498 until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Cape of Good Hope at Africa's southern tip represented a key location for ships travelling between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean. As such, the Dutch established the Cape Colony, centred on what became the port of Cape Town, in 1652, and this was taken by the British in 1806. That the British maintained a naval facility at Simonstown from the 1810s to 1950s illustrates the continued importance of the Cape route. Indeed, the British occupied the independent Boer (Dutch settler) Republic of Natalia on the Indian Ocean coast in 1843 to prevent some other naval power from accessing its harbours such as Port Natal, which became Durban. Besides its key location for international shipping, Southern African waters attracted European and American whalers during the late 1700s and early 1800s, and they established outposts at the Cape and visited Walvis Bay in Namibia, Delagoa Bay in Mozambique, and Madagascar. Whaling off Southern Africa experienced a resurgence in the early 1900s with coastal stations founded in South Africa, Namibia, Angola, and Mozambique. During the 1700s, enslaved and formerly enslaved people of colour including Muslims called "Cape Malay" given their Indonesian origin initiated a commercial fishing industry in the Dutch Cape Colony, which continues today.[30] Historically, Southern Africa and particularly the Cape developed its own colonial maritime culture from the 1700s, but navies operating in the region's waters were from other continents until the twentieth century.

Colonial Africa and Navies

Until around 1870, as described by Bruce Vandervort, African states represented the "Lords of the Land" while Europeans acted as the "Masters of the Water."[31] The European presence in Africa, except for the non-tropical far south and north where European settlers conquered territory, was limited to coastal entrepots or islands where European and American ships visited to trade with African intermediaries connected to the hinterland. For much of the nineteenth century, European officials and merchants who arrived by sea were generally satisfied to remain on the African coast where they acquired raw materials exported for industries at home. They lacked motivation to invade the interior given powerful African states and tropical disease. However, with the changing global circumstances of the 1880s and 1890s, Africa's absence of naval power made the continent vulnerable to European conquest. At a time when navies had long enabled Europeans to project power to Africa and command African waters, increasing imperial competition to control African territory and technological enablers related to weapons and tropical medicine resulted in the "Scramble for Africa." Steamboats provided important brown water naval support for European advances up Africa's great rivers with the British on the Niger and Nile, and the Belgians on the Congo ending African control of inland waterways. While economic factors like the desire for direct access to sources of African raw materials motivated European colonial conquest in many places including West Africa, strategic factors related to shipping routes through the Suez Canal and around the Cape became relevant in other regions. Furthermore, as European powers had largely agreed on the partition of Africa and their armies did not fight each other over the continent at this time, there were no naval engagements between them for access to the African coastline. One near exception occurred during the 1911 Morocco Crisis when Germany dispatched two warships to Morocco's Atlantic port of Agadir in response to French expansion in Morocco, which Berlin sought to exploit to gain territory elsewhere in Africa.[32]

Since European navies protected the coastline of colonial Africa and established permanent bases and fuelling stations at ports like Freetown and Djibouti, colonial territorial administrations within Africa raised locally recruited armies to maintain internal security and occasionally provide military manpower for external operations. While the British developed compact and frugal colonial armies that rarely deployed outside Africa, the French formed a large African army that defended metropolitan France during both world wars. Only in Nigeria did a colonial power, Britain, develop a locally recruited brown water navy called the Nigerian Marine to facilitate the imposition of a colonial state in the riverine environment of the south-east.[33] Another important point here is that Africa's colonial administrations, focused on extraction of land-based wealth from the 1890s to 1950s, did not worry much about securing the continent's maritime resources in an era of limited territorial waters but expanding international fishing.

Despite the rarity of colonial African navies, naval matters informed the conduct of the First World War in Africa. Initially, the British and French became determined to occupy German ports in Africa including Douala in Cameroon and Dar es Salaam in East Africa concerned that they would support German naval raiders threatening Entente shipping. In 1914, a combined Anglo-French naval operation in the Cameroon estuary seized Douala, but the landing of British-led Indian troops at Tanga in East Africa proved disastrous. Likewise, on two occasions, in 1914 and 1916, Ottoman land forces failed to seize the strategically important Suez Canal from the British.[34] During the interwar years, given economic austerity, Britain tried to relieve pressure on the Royal Navy by founding a network of small naval reserve forces across the empire including in coastal West and East Africa. These were the first locally recruited colonial naval forces in places like Kenya and the Gold Coast (Ghana)[35]

The naval dimension features prominently in Africa's Second World War history. During the conflict, especially in its early years with the closure of the Suez Canal, African ports like Freetown, Cape Town, and Durban became extremely important for Allied shipping redirected around southern Africa and threatened by German submarines in African waters. With the importance of raw materials from African colonies for the Allied war effort, African ports grew dramatically and served as assembly points for shipping convoys. Continuing previous trends, African sailors served on ships of combatant powers including Britain, France, and Italy. Important amphibious operations took place in Africa during the war including the Royal Navy's landing of Free French forces at Libreville in Gabon in November 1940, the British-South African invasion of Vichy French Madagascar in May 1942 meant to preclude the use of the island as a base for Japanese submarines, and the Operation Torch landings in North Africa in November 1942. The September 1940 British attempt to land Free French forces at Dakar failed inciting a naval engagement between British and Vichy French forces. Control of the Suez Canal informed the East Africa and North Africa campaigns. The presence of the Italian Red Sea Flotilla at Massawa in Eritrea, which blocked the southern approach to the canal, prompted Britain to invade Italian East Africa during 1940 and 1941. In North Africa, the Italians and eventually Germans pushed east from Libya intending to seize the canal, enter the Middle East, and link up with Axis forces in Russia. For Britain, defending the canal and utilizing it for Allied shipping represented a major war objective.

Naval operations in the Mediterranean often involved the North African coast. Just prior to the war, the threat of Italian aircraft attacking Malta prompted the Royal Navy to transfer its Mediterranean fleet headquarters to Alexandria from where British ships supported operations across the region. In early July 1940, in response to the fall of France, a Royal Navy taskforce destroyed the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir in Algeria to prevent its use by the Axis. The Royal Navy's dominance of the eastern Mediterranean served Britain well in the North African campaign fought along the coast of

Libya and Egypt. For example, in 1941, British and Australian ships based in Alexandria resupplied the besieged garrison of the Libyan port of Tobruk that threatened the rear of the eastward Axis advance into Egypt.

The Second World War inspired the creation of some of Africa's modern navies, which were also the first locally based navies in most of sub-Saharan Africa. After unsuccessfully attempting to establish a navy during the interwar era, the self-governing Union of South Africa established the Seaward Defence Force (SDF) in 1940 to take over the defence of local waters from the Royal Navy. In 1942, with larger ships from Britain, the SDF changed its name to South African Naval Force (SANF), and after the war, it became a permanent element of the Union Defence Force (UDF). During the war, South African naval vessels participated in convoy escort and anti-submarine operations in the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Pacific theatres. In 1941, a large portion of the Nigerian Marine transformed into the Nigerian Naval Defence Force (NNDF) to protect local ports. In other British colonies in Africa, naval reserves mobilized and assisted with port defence.[36]

Decolonization, the Cold War, and Modern African Navies

During the decolonization era of the 1950s and 1960s, many newly independent African states suddenly became responsible for their coastal waters and therefore founded navies. While the departing colonial powers left behind locally recruited land forces inherited by the new African governments, most of Africa's new navies were built entirely from scratch. Therefore, foreign sponsorship became extremely important in African naval development. Although African states lacked resources to buy or build naval vessels, including no appropriate shipyards, the new small navies of Africa were modelled on the much larger navies of world powers with equipment and training focused on conventional naval combat. As part of the transition to independence for African colonies, Britain attempted to shape African navies to augment its global interests and serve as customers for British shipbuilders. In 1950, Britain formed the East African Naval Force (EANF), renamed Royal East African Navy (REAN) three years later, reflecting imperial ambitions to federate the territories of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanganyika. Eventually, and partly a result of the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya (1952–56), Britain granted separate independence to its East African territories during the 1960s with the coastal states of Kenya and Tanganyika (eventually Tanzania) forming their own navies.[37] In 1950s West Africa, Britain cultivated soon-to-be independent Nigeria as a regional military ally donating a few obsolete ships to form the nucleus of a navy and sought to retain naval influence in neutral Ghana, which gained independence in 1957. The founding commanders of the Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghana navies were all Royal Navy officers, and African naval officer candidates trained in Britain.[38] Most of the former French colonies in Africa developed very small navies influenced by their continued close relationship with Paris including formal defence agreements and the continued

presence of French military and naval personnel. For example, in the 1960s, the new Senegalese Navy was entirely dependent on French officers and technicians to operate a few small patrol boats and two larger patrol vessels; one acquired from France and the other from the United States. Senegal eventually acquired three more large patrol boats from France in the early 1970s.[39]

The founding of African navies took place in a context of two important developments. First, growing international trade led to the expansion of African deep-water ports in the 1950s and 1960s with the new African governments entering major construction deals with foreign powers and companies. Second, the arrival of large international fishing fleets with refrigeration-equipped trawlers in African waters and the possibilities of offshore oil production prompted newly independent African nations like Kenya through the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to take a leading role in the 1960s and 1970s movement for the extension of territorial waters to give them greater access to maritime resources. While these efforts led to the creation of 200-nautical mile limit EEZs in 1982, African states would be unable to fully utilize their maritime resources without foreign assistance.[40]

Britain and France helped turn apartheid South Africa into a major African naval power. The 1955 Simonstown Agreement involved the transfer of Britain's Cape naval facilities to South Africa in exchange for continued access to the strategic site, and Britain's sale of numerous vessels including destroyers and frigates as well as maritime aircraft to the South African Navy during the 1950s and 1960s. Additionally, and as part of wider arms deals, France sold South Africa three submarines in the early 1970s. Increasing international isolation, however, prevented future purchases from major powers prompting South Africa to acquire missile boats from Israel in the late 1970s. With international arms embargoes and most defence spending going toward South Africa's ground and air war in southern Angola during the late 1970s and 1980s, the South African Navy abandoned deep-water naval capabilities and focused on coastal operations including support for special forces activities in neighbouring Angola and Mozambique.[41]

In the Cold War atmosphere, Eastern Bloc powers seeking influence among newly independent African states, especially those rejecting dependence on former colonial rulers, provided military support including in the naval domain. Distancing itself from Britain, and seeking a non-aligned foreign policy in support of continued African liberation, Tanzania built a politicized defence force during the 1960s and 1970s with communist China and the Soviet Union providing patrol boats, and China building a naval base at Dar-es-Salaam and training naval personnel.[42] Unusual among former French colonies, Guinea gained independence in 1958 rejecting continued ties with Paris and moving closer to the Eastern Bloc. In 1967, Guinea founded a small navy with Soviet and Chinese-made patrol boats and landing craft, and training by Chinese advisors. Reacting to Guinea's support for nationalist insurgents fighting in adjacent Portuguese Guinea, the Portuguese navy conducted an amphibious raid called "Operation Green Sea" on Conakry in November 1970. The Soviet navy then