

How Military Funding Shaped What We Do and Don't Know About the Ocean



A Hidden Force Behind Ocean Exploration

For centuries, the ocean has been a realm of mystery and fascination. Its depths hold secrets that have captivated explorers, scientists, and dreamers alike. But behind the scenes of our growing understanding of the ocean lies a surprising driving force: military funding.



Science on a Mission: How Military Funding Shaped What We Do and Don't Know about the Ocean

by Naomi Oreskes

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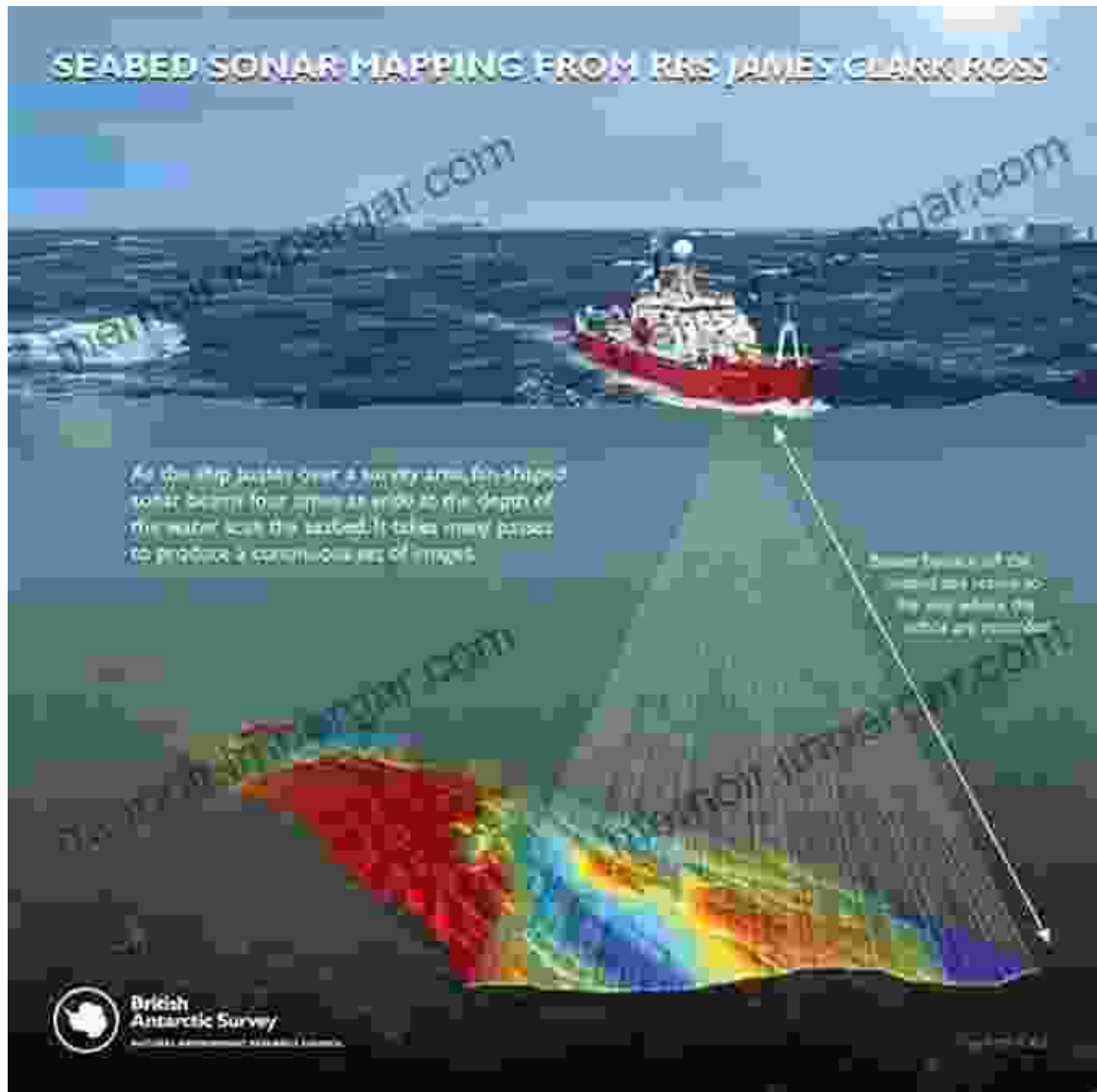
Throughout history, military advancements have played a pivotal role in shaping our knowledge of the underwater world. Submarines, sonar, and other technologies developed for warfare have inadvertently opened up new frontiers of oceanographic research.

Submarines: Diving into Uncharted Territory

The development of submarines marked a turning point in ocean exploration. These underwater vessels enabled scientists to venture into previously inaccessible depths, bringing back unprecedented data and observations.

In the 1930s, the United States Navy commissioned the USS Nautilus, the first nuclear-powered submarine. This revolutionary craft shattered depth records and allowed researchers to explore the ocean's darkest depths, uncovering hidden ecosystems and geological formations.

Sonar: Mapping the Underwater Landscape



Sonar, initially developed for military purposes to detect submarines, became an invaluable tool for oceanographers. By emitting sound waves and interpreting the echoes, sonar creates detailed maps of the ocean floor, revealing canyons, seamounts, and other underwater features.

In the 1950s, the US Navy's Hydrographic Office launched Operation HIRAN, a massive sonar survey of the Atlantic Ocean. The data collected

provided critical insights into the ocean's topography and paved the way for future exploration.

Military Funding and Oceanographic Research

Beyond providing technology, military funding has also directly supported oceanographic research. Government agencies, recognizing the potential of ocean data for military operations, have invested heavily in oceanography.

The US Office of Naval Research (ONR) has been a major benefactor of oceanographic research for decades. ONR funds projects that explore everything from underwater acoustics to marine biology, advancing our understanding of the ocean's dynamics and ecosystems.

The Unexpected Consequences

While military funding has been instrumental in advancing ocean exploration, it has also had unintended consequences.

The focus on military applications can sometimes skew research priorities towards areas of interest to the military, such as underwater warfare and surveillance. This can overshadow other important areas of oceanography, such as marine conservation and climate change research.

Additionally, the secrecy surrounding military research can limit the availability of data to the broader scientific community. This can hinder collaboration and slow the progress of oceanographic knowledge.

The influence of military funding on ocean exploration is a complex and often overlooked chapter in the history of science. While it has undoubtedly

accelerated our understanding of the ocean, it has also raised questions about the balance between scientific curiosity and national security.

As we continue to explore the depths of the ocean, it is essential to recognize the role that military funding has played and to consider its potential implications for the future of oceanographic research.

For a deeper dive into this fascinating topic, we recommend reading the book "How Military Funding Shaped What We Do and Don't Know About the Ocean," by Erik Larson. This comprehensive work provides a detailed exploration of the historical and contemporary links between military and oceanographic research.

Call to Action

Join us in unraveling the hidden connections between military funding and ocean exploration. Get your copy of Erik Larson's book today and embark on an extraordinary journey into the depths of knowledge and the complexities of human endeavor.

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