

STABILISING THE INDO-PACIFIC, THE NEW CENTRE OF THE WORLD

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‘The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society’ – Franklin D. Roosevelt

There is no denying that the Indo-Pacific is a region of intense modern political and economic interest. Through observance of historical patterns, especially noted through Ian Morris’ book *Why the West Rules for now*, the growth towards the East and evolving Indo-Pacific regional focus is the seeming natural and inevitable progression¹. Saon Ray, a Professor for the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, stated in an article² that there are three key reasons for the significance of the Indo-Pacific being the presence of three of the world’s largest economies (US, China and Japan); the region accounting for 60 percent of Global Domestic Product (GDP) and 60 percent of global maritime trade; and is home to the fastest growing emerging economies. Politically, the region is defined by the current Sino-US ‘strategic competition’³ which questions the nature of a common interest or commonality of purpose for all Indo-Pacific Nations. Presumably this would be to continue economic growth, prosperity, maintain stability and security. However, there still remains the challenge of an overarching ‘strategic competition’ between the major powers of the region. Where ‘strategic competition’ remains the underlying flavour of the region, a common interest cannot be sought as the fundamental definition of such competition is to outcompete the rival. Furthermore, reference to the US and China lingering on the edge of Thucydides trap⁴ threatens stability and the future of global prosperity. ‘Strategic competition’ must therefore evolve into something which drives Indo-Pacific Nations to contribute in a stabilised environment. ‘Competitive Coexistence’⁵ not only enables the continual influence and growth of the major powers in the region, but allows the contribution of emerging Nations to stabilise for ongoing prosperity and good order. Therefore, most simply, Indo-Pacific Navies should secure the continued growth of Indo-Pacific Nations. This will enable Nations to competitively coexist in a prosperous region vice surviving through destabilisation. This essay aims to discuss how Navies will

¹ I. Morris, *Why the West rules for now; the patterns of history, and what they reveal about the future*, (Profile Books Ltd, Great Britain, 2010)

² S. Ray, *Commerce and Connectivity for enhancing trade in the Indo-Pacific*, (Observer Research Foundation, 2021)

³ M. Sussex and M. Clarke, *In their own words: Chinese and US Perceptions of the Current State of Sino-US Relations*, (The Looking Glass Publication, Centre for Defence Research, 2021)

⁴ Term used to describe the tendency towards war when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power

⁵ W. Xinbo, “US Security Policy in Asia: Implications for China-US Relations”, Brookings, 2000
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/u-s-security-policy-in-asia-implications-for-china-u-s-relations/>

contribute to the goal of ‘Competitive Coexistence’ through military cooperative missions, Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) priorities, security of natural resources and communication. To understand where Navies should concentrate efforts, the Indo-Pacific must first be defined.



Figure 1: 1571 Indo-Pacific map

The Indo-Pacific and more traditional Asia-Pacific terms have been used interchangeably in the past to loosely define the sea areas and nations bound to the Pacific and Indian Oceans⁶. A map created by Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius in 1571 following early circumnavigation of the globe closely resembles modern understanding of nations belonging to the Indo-Pacific (or Asia-Pacific). The map frames only a small portion of the world spanning India, China, across to North America and south to the suspected sight of Australia (labelled “Beach”)⁷.

However, there is, in fact, no universal official definition of the Asia Pacific region nor its boundaries⁸. Countries that are inclusive of the term often vary depending on the context. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) for example consists of nations in both the Western Pacific (predominantly Asian and South-East Asian countries) as well as the Eastern

⁶ “Countries of the Asia-Pacific Region”, Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2021 <https://apcss.org/about/ap-countries/>

⁷ A. Galloway, “What’s the Indo-Pacific – and how does the Quad work?”, The Sydney Morning Herald, 2021 <https://www.smh.com.au/national/forget-asia-pacific-it-s-the-indo-pacific-we-live-in-now-where-is-that-exactly-20210810-p58hku.html>

⁸ “APAC Countries 2022”, World Population Review, 2022 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/apac-countries>

Pacific (United States). The goal of APEC is to ‘support sustainable economic growth and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region’⁹. Another example is the Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation (APAC), a specialist regional body (recognised by APEC), which ‘manages and expands mutual recognition arrangements (MRA)’ to ‘facilitate acceptance of conformity assessment results’ and thus increases ‘economic efficiency’¹⁰. APAC however only consists of nations in the Western Pacific (Asia and South-East Asia including Australia, up to China and Japan). In attempting to define the geography of the Indo-Pacific, APAC and the 1571 map above may be among the closest references. However, whilst the geographical differentiations between the Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific are seemingly minimal, the terms are vastly different in their political significance. These political influences include the US focus on India as a rising power in response to the rise of China¹¹; the merging of Australia into the region as seen by an Indonesian Naval Paper¹²; and the interconnectedness of the Pacific and Indian Oceans for maritime trade and prosperity. The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ had been referenced by Hillary Clinton, Former US secretary, in 2010 however Australia was the first country to utilise the term in official documents in 2013 (the Defence White Paper and Foreign Policy White Paper)¹³. The term seemed to gain further traction during the Trump administration which revealed certain aspects of US foreign policy; in particular focusing on China¹⁴. The common theme of the rise of China in competition with the US, seems to be the underlying context in defining boundaries of the term ‘Indo-Pacific’. This means when considering how Indo-Pacific Navies can work towards a common interest, the Sino-US relationship cannot be ignored. Therefore, in attempting to define the geographical boundaries of the Indo-Pacific and thus where cooperation should exist between regional Indo-Pacific Navies, it would be prudent to define the area through the lens of the Sino-US ‘Strategic Competition’.

⁹ APEC Secretariat, “Mission Statement”, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, 2021
<https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec/mission-statement>

¹⁰ Asia Pacific Accreditation Cooperation, “About APAC”, 2022 <https://www.apac-accreditation.org/about/>

¹¹ A. Galloway, “What’s the Indo-Pacific – and how does the Quad work?”, The Sydney Morning Herald, 2021
<https://www.smh.com.au/national/forget-asia-pacific-it-s-the-indo-pacific-we-live-in-now-where-is-that-exactly-20210810-p58hku.html>

¹² P. Pengkajian and M. Seskoal, *Indonesia-Australia Maritime Security: Challenges and Cooperation*, (Joint Publication Indonesian Navy – RAN, Seskoal Press, Indonesia Naval Command and Staff College, 2020)

¹³ A. Galloway, 2021

¹⁴ M. Siow, “What is the Indo-Pacific region and why does the US keep using this term?”, 2021
<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3146363/what-indo-pacific-region-and-why-does-us-keep-using-term>



Figure 2: Indo-Pacific Region

Figure 2 demonstrates the geography of the Sino-US ‘Strategic Competition’ by the overlap of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (indicated in blue) and the ‘One Belt, One road initiative’ (indicated in red) through Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan. Note also that the four countries linked by the US Indo-Pacific Strategy are part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or ‘Quad’ for short). Formed in 2004, it was later abandoned in 2008 following claims (by China) it was an “Asian NATO” designed to contain China¹⁵. The problem that lies in this region of overlapping and competing foreign policies is how all Indo-Pacific nations are able to build stability and coexist; especially where it is currently defined by ‘Strategic Competition’ supposedly destined for war. Enter Thucydides.

‘The defining question about global order in the decades ahead will be: Can China and the United States escape Thucydides’ Trap? The historian’s metaphor reminds us of the dangers two parties face when a rising power rivals a ruling power – as Athens did in 5th century BC and Germany did at the end of the 19th century. Most such challenges have ended in war. Peaceful cases required huge adjustments in the attitudes and actions of the

¹⁵ A. Galloway, “What’s the Indo-Pacific – and how does the Quad work?”, The Sydney Morning Herald, 2021 <https://www.smh.com.au/national/forget-asia-pacific-it-s-the-indo-pacific-we-live-in-now-where-is-that-exactly-20210810-p58hku.html>

governments and the societies involved’ – Graham Allison, Financial Times, 2012¹⁶

‘It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable’ - Thucydides

In 2012, Graham Allison (an American political scientist) created the concept of the ‘Thucydides Trap’ which was based on the above quote by the Ancient Athenian and Military General, Thucydides¹⁷. ‘Thucydides Trap’ was used to describe a tendency towards war whereby a rising power challenges a ruling power. In 2017, Allison likened the inevitable conflict between Athens and Sparta in the Peloponnesian War to the current Sino-US strategic competition in his book *Destined for War*. ‘Rise’ and ‘Fear’ were identified as the dynamic driving factors towards the Peloponnesian war and thus a ‘trap’ that US and China are to avoid as to maintain Indo-Pacific stability and prevent inevitable war. Whilst there are some inaccuracies in comparing the Sino-US relationship to Athens and Sparta (for example, ‘Rise’ referenced by Thucydides was typically territorial expansion which is not the problem between the US and China)¹⁸, the rise of China is not fully understood and to the current ruling power this is at times comprehended as threatening and thus a source of ‘fear’. The development of Chinese foreign policy historically from 韬光养晦 ‘*taoguangyanghui*’ (keeping a low profile and bide your time) to 奋发有为 ‘*fenfayouwei*’ (striving for achievement)¹⁹ demonstrates China intends to continue to ‘rise’. This means the avoidance of ‘fear’ should be the focus in maintaining a peaceful and therefore prosperous and stable Indo-Pacific. Striving for ‘Competitive Coexistence’ means to aim for a trend of multipolarization in the region, meaning a distribution of power and interdependence which can significantly contribute to stability and prosperity. Therefore, Indo-Pacific Navies must ensure Indo-Pacific Nations continued growth with the intent to promote interdependence, autonomous contribution and thus a ‘Competitive Coexistence’ for the US and China.

The Indo-Pacific is a region characterised by the marine economy due to its economic significance and percentage of global maritime trade. Due to the significance of the sea domain

¹⁶ A. Misenheimer, *Thucydides’ Other “Traps”: the United States, China and the prospect of “Inevitable” war*, (National War College, Washington, 2019)

¹⁷ A. Misenheimer

¹⁸ A. Misenheimer

¹⁹ M. Sussex and M. Clarke, *In their own words: Chinese and US Perceptions of the Current State of Sino-US Relations*, (The Looking Glass Publication, Centre for Defence Research, 2021)

in this region, Indo-Pacific Navies are at the forefront of promoting stability, security and prosperity through ongoing military collaboration and mutual trust. This mutual trust and military collaboration can also contribute towards reducing environmental risks in the region which would impact on the growth of emerging economies. In considering the environment and climate of the Indo-Pacific, the region is governed by transient conditions and monsoonal seasons resulting in nutrient rich waters. Whilst the monsoonal trends are a yearly cycle due to the movement of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), worsening storm conditions and increasing prevalence of natural disasters are attributed to the evolving Climate. According to the 2020 Ecological Threat Register, the region has ‘suffered the most natural disasters in the last 30 years’ and will continue to witness increasing stress (specifically water related) in the coming 20 years²⁰ due to current ecological threats and climate change. Organisations, such as APEC, recognise the need for environmentally sustainable methods for economies to cooperate towards prosperity as well as address the risks to stability from Climate Change and ecological threats²¹. The problem of destructive overfishing and overexploitation of natural resources in the region is one key ecological threat. Destructive fishing methods include poison fishing and bottom trawling which cause extensive reef damage as well as overfishing due to ‘illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU)’ fishing²²; not to mention the contribution to pollution in the region from poisons utilised as well as abandoned or discarded ghost nets. Water pollution and acidification from these forms of destructive fishing in turn contributes to Climate Change²³ whilst overfishing induces heightened localised stress due to limited food availability. An example of a successful military cooperative exercise which can be replicated between Indo-Pacific Navies to regulate fishing in the region is the recent Australia and Indonesia combined maritime patrol AUSINDO CORPAT 2021. The five-day patrol was conducted along the shared maritime border between Australia and Indonesia with the aim of deterring illegal fishing²⁴. The AUSINDO CORPAT 2021 is an example of Indo-Pacific Navies building mutual

²⁰ Vision of Humanity, “Natural Disasters & Water Stress Threaten Asia-Pacific”, Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), 2022, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/more-natural-disasters-and-water-stress-threaten-asia-pacific/>

²¹ “Supporting the Indo-Pacific to tackle climate change”, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/climate-change/supporting-indo-pacific-tackle-climate-change>

²² K. DeRidder and S. Nindang, “Southeast Asia’s Fisheries Near Collapse from Overfishing”, The Asia Foundation, California, 2018, <https://asiafoundation.org/2018/03/28/southeast-asias-fisheries-near-collapse-overfishing/>

²³ “Climate and Security in the Indo-Asia Pacific”, Planetary Security Initiative, 2020, <https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/climate-and-security-indo-asia-pacific>

²⁴ “Australia and Indonesia conduct combined maritime patrol”, Department of Defence, Defence News, 2021, <https://news.defence.gov.au/media/media-releases/australia-and-indonesia-conduct-combined-maritime-patrol>

trust and collaboration towards ensuring a secure future for the fishing industry. This sees the reduction of ecological and Climate Change threat stressors as well as subsequently ensuring availability of resources for continued economic growth. Coordinated patrols within the region between Indo-Pacific Navies will continue to promote interconnectedness as well as prompt all Nations to autonomously contribute.

Climate Change is another emerging threat with potentially catastrophic impacts to the physical and strategic environment²⁵. As stated previously, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters is increasing which has the potential to pose threat to the wellbeing and security of Nations in the region. “Changes in the oceans are a particular focal point. The Indo-Asia Pacific’s coastal megacities and its far-flung island nations are highly vulnerable to sea level rise, storm surges, and saltwater intrusion into freshwater aquifers.”²⁶ Sea level rise for example has the potential to impact defined maritime boundaries and thus the security of Nations. Meanwhile disruptions to supply chain components due to projected Climate Changes poses a very real threat to economic development and prosperity. Noting the emergence of growing economies in the region whom are at risk of being severely impacted by Climate Change (e.g. Pacific Islands and Indonesian Archipelago) and therefore the increased stressors impacting the Nations sense of security; reaching the goal of ‘Competitive Coexistence’ through multipolarization and maintaining security in the region becomes challenging.

‘Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, increasing security threats across the Indo-Pacific region, from increasingly devastating storms and sea level rise, to migrating fish stock compromising the region’s food security. The region’s megacities are at particular risk, which will only intensify with high temperatures and warmer waters. Now is the time for “climate proofing” measures, from incorporating climate security risks into foreign and defense policies in the region, to strengthening capacities for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Security organizations should work together with diplomatic, development and disaster response agencies to coordinate preparedness, planning and response’ – IMCCS Secretary General, the Honorable Sherri Goodman

²⁵ S. Fetzek and D. McGinn, “Climate Change is a Security Threat to the Asia-Pacific”, The Diplomat, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/climate-change-is-a-security-threat-to-the-asia-pacific/>

²⁶ S. Fetzek and D. McGinn, 2020

Indo-Pacific Navies should identify these regions at higher risk of Natural Disasters and other Climate Change related issues to develop effective response measures. These will need to be executed as quickly as possible to ensure minimal disruption to maritime trade as well as supporting the effected Nation's recovery. The coordinated Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) efforts following the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004 is a good example which included Australia, Japan, India and the US. However, to truly promote multipolarization in the region, a wider array of Nations including Indonesia, the Pacific Islands, and China should be included in such examples. For a region as large as the Indo-Pacific, it may also be effective if Indo-Pacific Navies were to adopt a state-of-readiness in order to posture and respond to disasters that may occur based on statistical data. In 2011, a statistical assessment of Tropical Cyclone Tracks in the Western North Pacific presented findings relating to frequency and location of Tropical Cyclones. Key findings in particular included a clear overall pattern of storm paths, 'with westward motion at low latitudes (northern hemisphere) and eastward motion at mid and high latitudes' as well as the average occurrence of storms being within the July-October period.²⁷ Similarly In 2018, a statistical assessment of Tropical Cyclone Tracks in the Southern Hemisphere determined that Global Warming caused tropical expansion²⁸. This led to the incidence of tropical cyclones intensifying in the South Indian Ocean whilst Cyclone locations were moving both poleward and towards the equator. The majority of Tropical Cyclones were observed to occur in the January to March period.²⁹ In considering this statistical data, Indo-Pacific Navies are able to concentrate response plans to the Southern portion of the Indo-Pacific in early and late months of the year whilst focusing in the Northern Indo-Pacific (Philippines and northward) in mid-year. More efficient means of responding to Natural Disasters lead to quicker recoveries and thus continued growth.

Indo-Pacific Navies are able to adopt environmentally sustainable practices to reduce shipping emissions contributing to Climate Change. Shipping Emissions are calculated based on: the weight and ongoing demand for products, distance the vessel must travel, efficiency and fuel used³⁰. Whilst the Indo-Pacific is the centre of significant economic growth and prosperity, it

²⁷ E. Yonekura and T. Hall, "A Statistical Model of Tropical Cyclone Tracks in the Western North Pacific with ENSO-Dependent Cyclogenesis", *Journal of Applied Meteorology and Climatology* (2011) Vol 50, No 8, pp. 1725-1739

²⁸ An expansion of the northern and southern latitude boundaries to the tropics

²⁹ H. Ramsay, S. Chand and S. Camargo, "A Statistical Assessment of Southern Hemisphere Tropical Cyclone Tracks in Climate Models", *Journal of Climate*, (2018) Volume 31: Issue 24, Pages 10081 – 10104, American Meteorological Society

³⁰ S. Bullock, "Ten ways to cut shipping's contribution to climate change – from a researcher", The Conversation Media Group, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/ten-ways-to-cut-shippings-contribution-to-climate-change-from-a-researcher-167997>

is a significant contributor to global emissions. Due to the projected damage this region is causing the Climate, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and UN has placed the reduction of shipping emissions high in their priorities. There are varying methods to reduce emissions which include technology and technical changes, naval architecture design and operational measures. In the immediate future, Indo-Pacific Navies are able to focus on operational measures to reduce emissions which in turn builds trust between Nations that the region, in its entirety, cares about Climate impacts on Nation security and prosperity. The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) collaborated on a major study in 2010 to identify 53 different ship types which efficiency technologies could be applied³¹. The study determined 22 existing technical and operational measures that could immediately be integrated in shipping in order to reduce emissions. These 22 measures were split into 15 groups (Figure 3). When considering the immediate actions Indo-Pacific Navies can take to ensure minimal delays to ongoing patrol requirements, Weather Routing and Speed Reduction will be discussed.

Propeller Polishing	Hull Cleaning	Speed Reduction
Autopilot Upgrade	Air Lubrication	Main Engine Retrofits
Water Flow Optimization	Hull Coating	Speed Controlled Pumps and Fans
Weather Routing	Wind Power	High-Efficiency Lighting
Propeller Upgrade	Waste Heat Reduction	Solar Panels

Figure 3: Technologies and operations strategies to reduce emissions from ships

Weather Routing is a method of utilising currents, weather forecasts and sea conditions to determine a fuel-efficient route for voyages. This method is already used by a large portion of the world's fleet however, noting the dynamic and occasional sporadic nature of some Naval patrols, the method can be employed better by Indo-Pacific Navies. A part of training as a Maritime Warfare Officer (MWO) in Australia includes the introduction of routing charts provided by the UK Hydrographic Office. These charts are based on historical data of statistical weather patterns, wind directions and recommended routes. This data is able to be utilised to determine an effective route and passage plan whilst ensuring fuel efficiency.

³¹ "Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Ships", White Paper Number 11, The International Council on Clean Transportation, Washington, 2011, www.theicct.org

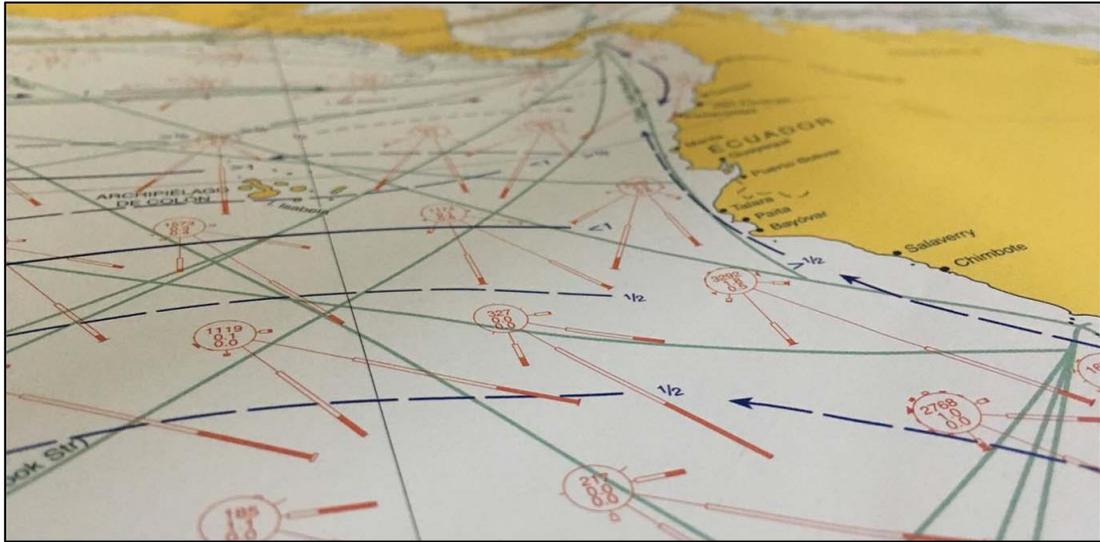


Figure 4: Example Admiralty Routing Chart

Bowditch's *American Practical Navigator* provides further information on the principles of weather routing. In particular, a diagram (Figure 5) is presented which details the performance curves for a commercial vessel proceeding at 18 knots impacted by weather and seas approaching from varying directions. The diagram indicates a ship experiencing following seas will have a reduced impact to ship speed than a ship experiencing head seas, which would most likely travel a far shorter distance in the prevailing conditions with minimal fuel economy. By utilising these methods of weather routing, Indo-Pacific Navies are able to ensure optimum fuel efficiency where possible.

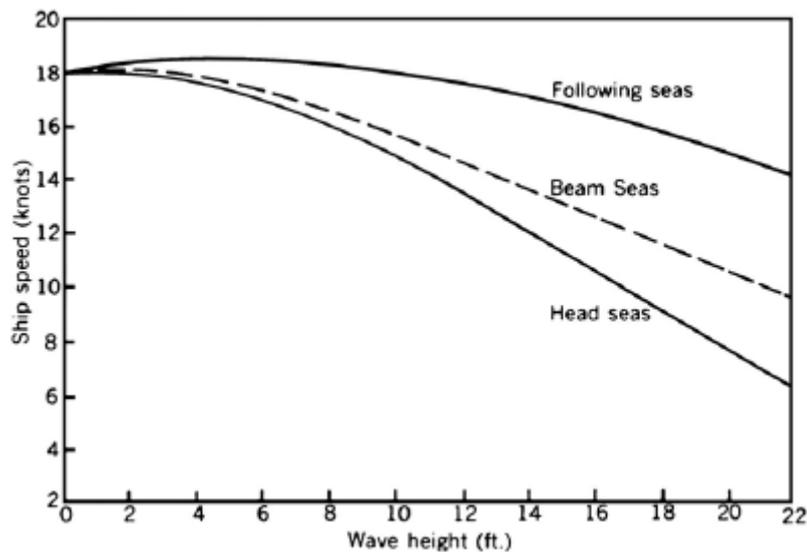


Figure 5: Performance curves for head, beam and following seas

Noting following seas in significant weather conditions maintain ship speeds within 2 to 4kts, where routes are planned to account for a following sea, Indo-Pacific Naval vessels

subsequently would be able to reduce speed and thus main engine power in order to further conserve fuel. Whilst there are greater opportunities for Indo-Pacific Navies to collaborate on technology advances to reduce emissions in their respective fleets, these immediate operational measures would be effective for Indo-Pacific Navies deployed in collaborative patrols through the region.

In order to effectively conduct collaborative missions or patrols and planning for effective response procedures to build mutual trust between Indo-Pacific Navies, Communication is the final glue. Communication can be achieved through cultural integration which may include ongoing exchange positions throughout Indo-Pacific Navies for valuable information sharing and skill development. Language in particular should become a key focus to Indo-Pacific Navies individual professional development. Language not only allows for communication across borders but certain characteristics of cultures are present within the language. Chinese and Japanese languages, for example, highlight an underlying art to their writing systems (Chinese Calligraphy and Japanese *Kanji*) which draw significant links to their respective cultures. Chinese Calligraphy in particular, when handwritten, has historically referenced the strength or resolve of a significant military general or leader in the Nation and when mimicked by one's own handwriting, is believed to provide insight into the nature of that person. Additionally, the structure and components of a Chinese character can also determine the varying English translations depending on the context. Pidgeon English or *Tok Pisin* (spoken in Papua New Guinea) as well as elements of Indonesia demonstrate an underlying cultural aspect of owning or possessing being important. For example, the phrase 'I don't understand', *Mi no harim gut tok bilong yu*, literally translates to 'I don't understand the speak/ talk belonging to you'. In 2016, Wendy Ayres-Bennett, a Professor of French Philology and Linguistics at the University of Cambridge, wrote an article discussing the recent language policy introduced within the British Army to address growing risks to national security from language shortages. The policy included language studies and cultural training as a core competence in military progression.³² Adopting a similar policy within Indo-Pacific Navies would therefore provide a number of benefits. Noting the diversity of cultures within the Indo-Pacific, mutual understanding of language and thus culture would provide the foundations for

³² W. Ayres-Bennett, "How the British military became a champion for language learning", The Conversation Media Group, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/how-the-british-military-became-a-champion-for-language-learning-60000>

coexistence within the region. Such policy would demonstrate a clear intent for Navies to communicate and therefore cooperate.

In conclusion, the Indo-Pacific is defined by evolving regional relationships and economic growth. The Indo-Pacific region is currently defined by 'Strategic Competition' between the rising power, China, and ruling power, US. This means the role of Indo-Pacific Nations and subsequently Indo-Pacific Navies will become increasingly important in maintaining stability, security and ongoing prosperity to evolve beyond 'Strategic Competition' towards 'Competitive Coexistence'. As discussed throughout this essay, Indo-Pacific Navies are to employ various measures including collaborative patrols, HADR response plans, Climate Change considerations and communication development. These measures will promote interconnectedness and interdependence between Nations striving to autonomously contribute to the region and thus maintain global order. It is without a doubt, the future of the world is deeply entwined with the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, with the vision of a stable, ordered and economically prosperous region at the forefront of all Indo-Pacific Nations (not just the major powers), Che Guevara's words ring true that peaceful coexistence cannot be limited to the powerful countries if we want to ensure world peace.