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Canada in the Indo-Pacific: Surmising a Role for the Canadian Armed Forces

JCSP 47

Exercise Solo Flight

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 47 – PCEMI 47

2020 – 2022

Exercise Solo Flight – Exercice Solo Flight

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CANADA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: SURMISING A ROLE FOR THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific is a region of great strategic importance, both from economic and security standpoints. Economically, the region is home to important trade routes through which 60% of global maritime trade passes,¹ while its large population and high growth rate make it an important driver for global economic growth at a time when more economically developed regions are experiencing declining growth. Security-wise, the Indo-Pacific has been called a “region of flashpoints” for the ongoing tensions between nations in the region.² These include territorial disputes, destabilizing actions by North Korea, the contested status of Taiwan’s sovereignty, and concerns over the military build-up and coercive behaviour of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) towards its neighbours.

While far removed from most Indo-Pacific states by the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, Canada is nonetheless a Pacific nation with strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. As a nation whose economic prosperity depends on trade and the international rules-based order that underlies economic globalization, the maintenance of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific is of vital importance to Canada.

The recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia serves as incentive for governments to re-assess threats and previously held security assumptions, and the implications to their

¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke, and Max Molot, “The Critical Role of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea,” *China and the US: Cooperation, Competition and/or Conflict an Experimental Assessment*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2019. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep22586.30>.

² Céline Pajon and Eva Pejsova, “A Region of Flashpoints? Security in the Indo-Pacific,” Brussels School of Governance – Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy, September 16, 2021. https://brussels-school.be/sites/default/files/CSDS%20Policy%20Brief_2115_0.pdf

foreign policies. For Canada, salient considerations will most certainly include the defence of North America, Arctic security, and maintaining the country's longstanding commitment to NATO allies in Europe, however, the list of strategically important theatres does not end there. Indeed, there have long been calls from commentators for the Government of Canada to develop a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy.³ The events in Eastern Europe are reflective of a changing security environment featuring strategic competition between great powers and increasing challenges to the international rules-based order, and the lack of a clear strategy for a region as important as the Indo-Pacific risks leaving Canada caught flat-footed. The pending release of this much-anticipated strategy is expected to identify how Canada will employ its instruments of national power to advance its interest and support peace and security in the Indo-Pacific.⁴

Defence policies should support a government's broader foreign policies and the pending government strategy will therefore be key in setting the direction for any activities undertaken by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in the Indo-Pacific. In the meantime, potential options for the employment of Canada's military instrument of power can be extrapolated from the policy approaches that have been proposed by analysts, as well as other known salient factors and pragmatic realities. These include the size and capabilities of the CAF, Canada's role on the world stage as a middle power, and lack of a physical footprint west of Canada's Pacific coast. This paper will argue that the

³ See, for example, J. Berkshire Miller, 2021; Stephen Nagy, 2021; Eric Lehre, 2021; Robert Fife and Stephen Chase, 2021.

⁴ The creation of a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy was directed in the December 2021 ministerial mandate letters for the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development; the Minister of International Development; and the Minister of National Defence. See "Mandate Letters," Prime Minister of Canada, December 16, 2021, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters>.

employment of RCN assets in a maritime-centric approach to the region represents the most viable option for the CAF to effectively support a Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy.

To support the argument, this paper will examine the geopolitical and security environment of the Indo-Pacific to identify potential opportunities for Canadian engagement. In anticipation of the release of a Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy, leading policy options that have been suggested by analysts will be considered alongside potential indicators of how the government may be leaning. Based on the preceding discussion, the paper will conclude by considering how CAF assets can most effectively be employed to support a Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy that holistically leverages Canadian instruments of power.

Geopolitical and Security Context of the Indo-Pacific

Deemed the “world’s fastest growing and most dynamic economic region,”⁵ the Indo-Pacific is a geopolitically important theatre of opportunities and tensions. The geopolitical environment is characterized by competition between growing economies, territorial challenges, a complex web of regional security and governance arrangements, and an overshadowing hegemonic competition between the US and PRC. The name *Indo-Pacific* gained prominence in 2016 with the articulation by Shinzo Abe, then Prime Minister of Japan, of a vision for a *free and open Indo-Pacific* (FOIP), which emphasized regional cooperation for peace, stability and freedom of navigation, and was generally perceived as a counterweight to China’s growing assertiveness in the region.⁶

Geographically, the Indo-Pacific is commonly understood to represent a broader

⁵ Canadian Global Affairs Institute, "Advancing Trade with the Indo-Pacific: Canada’s Role in Welcoming New Members to the CPTPP," CE Think Tank Newswire, Jun 15, 2021.

⁶ Leszek Buszynskin and Do Thanh Hai, *Maritime Issues and Regional Order in the Indo-Pacific* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2021), xiii.

conceptualization of the Asia-Pacific in that it includes the Indian Ocean,⁷ as depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1 – Comparison of the Indo-Pacific and Asia-Pacific Regions

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies

Significant and varied tensions underlie the relationships between Indo-Pacific states, which include six of the world's nuclear-armed powers.⁸ Unresolved disputes include the contested status of Taiwan and India-Pakistan disagreements over Kashmir, while border disputes in the Himalayas have led to deadly skirmishes between the Chinese and Indian militaries as recently as 2021. The PRC's incursions into the exclusive economic zones of neighbours, build-up and militarization of human-made

⁷ Sorpong Peou, *Peace and Security in Indo-Pacific Asia : IR Perspectives in Context* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 11.

⁸ These are China, India, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia and the United States.

islands, and rejection of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's 2016 ruling on territorial claims in the South China Sea (SCS) have sparked international concerns over Chinese threats to the international rules-based order and maintenance of peace and security in the region. Other recent challenges to democratic ideals and rules-based order in the region include the 2021 military coup d'état in Myanmar, "the calcification of military rule in Thailand and an authoritarian tilt in the Philippines."⁹ Further, North Korea's contravention of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on the proliferation of nuclear weapons continues to be a source of destabilization.

Great power competition between the United States (US) and PRC represents a significant tension in the Indo-Pacific. The relative growth rates of the US and Chinese economies over the last four decades have placed China on a trajectory to overtake the US' position as the world's largest economy,¹⁰ just as China's military expansion is poising it to challenge the US regional hegemony that emerged following the Second World War.¹¹ Under the presidency of Xi Jinping, China's launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has allowed it to gain strategically important footholds in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, providing China access to ports and infrastructure, and opportunities for further economic growth and military expansion. Reaction to the BRI varies globally;

⁹ Stephen Nagy, "Indo-Pacific Resilience, Prosperity and Stability: Canada's Capabilities-led Approach to Strategic Free and Open Indo-Pacific Engagement," Canadian Global Affairs Institute, March 2021, https://www.cgai.ca/indo_pacific_resilience_prosperity_and_stability_canada_s_capabilities_led_approach_to_strategic_free_and_open_indo_pacific_engagement.

¹⁰ "GDP, Current Prices," World Economic Outlook, International Monetary Fund, accessed 25 April 2022. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/CHN/USA>

¹¹ Areas of PRC military capability expansion include joint long-range precision strikes, space and counterspace capabilities, and large-scale expansion of its nuclear forces. While overt reference to competition with the US military is not made, the PRC's national strategy states an objective to strengthen the People Liberation's Army into a "world class" military by the end of 2049. See United States, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2021* (Washington DC: Department of Defence, 2021), v.

proponents may point to its laudable goal of achieving “sustainable development in a region of the world where development is sorely needed,”¹² while critics have portrayed it as a “predatory development program” and “debt-trap diplomacy.”¹³ As a counter to the BRI, in 2021 the US and G7 launched the Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership, presenting it as “a values-driven, high-standard, and transparent infrastructure partnership” to address infrastructure funding needs in the developing world.¹⁴

Against this backdrop of interstate tensions, a variety of traditional and non-traditional security challenges face Indo-Pacific states. The proliferation of nuclear weapons, piracy, transnational crime, the effects of climate change and natural resource depletion feature among the regional security threats.¹⁵ Increasing security challenges in the maritime domain are pronounced, having a significant impact on the strategic environment. These include threats to freedom of navigation and disruption of sea lanes of communication, maritime safety, illegal fishing, human and drug trafficking, and pollution and the effects of climate change.

The architecture of regional forums, security arrangements, and international organizations active in the region is becoming increasingly complex. Considered by some

¹² David De Cremer, Bruce McKern, and Jack McGuire, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Opportunities and Challenges of a Chinese Economic Ambition* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2020), 3. Also see Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “China’s Economic Growth Mostly Welcomed in Emerging Markets, but Neighbors Wary of Its Influence,” Pew Research Centre, December 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/12/PG_2019.12.05_Balance-of-Power_FINAL.pdf

¹³ United States, Office of the Secretary of State, “The Elements of the China Challenge,” accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>

¹⁴ “Fact Sheet: President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership,” White House Statements and Releases, June 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/>

¹⁵ Celine Pajon and Eva Pejsova, “A Region of Flashpoints? Security in the Indo-Pacific,” Brussels School of Governance, CSDS Policy Brief, September 16, 2021, https://brussels-school.be/sites/default/files/CSDS%20Policy%20Brief_2115_0.pdf

to be the “institutional core” of the Indo-Pacific,¹⁶ the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an important body for multilateral cooperation on regional challenges. Despite the region’s overall rapid economic growth, widespread poverty and infrastructure shortcomings remain and important bodies that support economic development in the region include the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Security-wise, in addition to longer-standing agreements such as the Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence alliance, in more recent years a multitude of bi- and multi-lateral security agreements have emerged between regional players.¹⁷ Recent agreements involving Canadian allies (but of which Canada is not a part) include the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Australia-United Kingdom-United States Partnership (AUKUS.)¹⁸ The East Asia Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting – Plus remain important forums for managing the region’s security architecture.¹⁹

Within this increasingly complex system of security and economic cooperation agreements, Canada must judiciously determine where best to make its contributions among regional players to demonstrate value-added. The plethora of regional security

¹⁶ Stephanie Martel, “A New Regional Order in the ‘Indo-Pacific?’ Lessons for Canada,” Network for Strategic Analysis, February 24, 2021, <https://ras-nsa.ca/a-new-regional-order-in-the-indo-pacific-lessons-for-canada/>

¹⁷ Examples include the 2007 Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation and the 2009 Joint Statement on Enhanced Global and Security Cooperation between Australia and the Republic of Korea. See Yoshihide Soeya, “Middle-Power Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Era,” *Issues and Studies* 56, no. 2 (June 2020): 1-22.

¹⁸ The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is comprised of members Australia, India, Japan and the United States. See Sheila A. Smith, “The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know,” Council on Foreign Relations, May 27, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quad-indo-pacific-what-know>

¹⁹ Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2017), 90. <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/canada-defence-policy.html>

challenges present ample opportunity to match Canadian capabilities and strengths to advance security objectives in select areas.

Options for a Canadian Indo-Pacific Strategy

A CAF role in the Indo-Pacific cannot be decided in the absence of government direction and, as stated at the outset of Canada's 2016 defence policy review, "defence policy is guided by foreign policy."²⁰ The 2021 ministerial mandate letters identify the creation of a "comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy to deepen diplomatic, economic and defence partnerships and international assistance in the region" as a foreign policy priority for the Government of Canada.²¹ While the strategy has not yet been unveiled, foreign policy analysts have in the interim provided suggestions for approaches that Canada could adopt to best serve its interests in the Indo-Pacific. The options have frequently focused on Canada's stance relative to its relationships with the US and PRC, reflecting the geopolitical significance of the strategic competition between these two states and a recognition that Canada, as a middle power, must find a role to play on the margins of that competition.

The policy approaches discussed by Kawasaki (2016) and Holland (2021) explore options on a spectrum ranging from developing closer ties to China at one end, to neutrality, to overt alignment with the US at the other end.²² They come to similar

²⁰ As quoted from Canada's 2016 Defence Policy Review Public Consultation Document. See Marius Grinius, "Canada's Security Role in Asia-Pacific," Canadian Global Affairs Institute, July 2016. https://www.cgai.ca/canada_s_security_role_in_asia_pacific

²¹ This task is assigned to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with support from the Ministers of: International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development; International Development; and National Defence. See Prime Minister of Canada, "Mandate Letters."

²² Kawasaki proposes four options: *active honest broker*, in which Canada assumes a neutral position between the two powers; *staying put (status quo)*, in which Canada continues to "free-rid[e] on the US military...for the protection of the general strategic interest that it shares with the US"; *active pro-US military policy*; and *active pro-US diplomatic policy*. Holland presents three options: *pivoting to China*, in

conclusions in recommending that Canada's interests are best served by alignment with the United States, who in 2020 pivoted from an *engage* to a *confront* foreign policy approach to China, and has expressed strong support for the FOIP conceptualization articulated by Japan.²³ Kawasaki suggests that an *active pro-US diplomatic policy* would see Canada clearly assert its disapproval of coercive actions that threaten the rules-based order in the region, and affirm its support for freedom of navigation and overflight. Holland emphasizes the relative importance of Canada's economic and security relationship with US, the country's most important ally, while also highlighting that alignment with the US over China would better uphold "Canada's identity as a nation committed to the rule of law, democracy, and human rights."²⁴ Both authors suggest that taking a clear stance in alignment with the US strategy would better position Canada to seek inclusion in important security forums, and increase its political clout in the region.²⁵ In contrast to the US-centric approaches proposed by Holland and Kawasaki, other commentators have suggested there is prudence in staking a path along the middle ground, similar to the *honest broker* option discussed (and rejected) by Kawasaki. Martel makes a case for an approach that centers on "providing constructive and principled support to regional multilateralism," particularly through ASEAN.²⁶ Such an approach, it

which Canada treats China as a friend and strategic partner; *keeping equidistance between Washington and Beijing* - i.e. neutrality; and *aligning with the US FOIP strategy*. See Tsuyoshi Kawasaki, "Where does Canada fit in the US-China strategic competition across the Pacific?" *International Journal*, 71:2 (2016): 214-230, and Kenneth Holland, "Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 27:2 (March 2021): 228-250.

²³ In what has been called "the biggest shift in US foreign policy since the Cold War," the US Secretary of State announced "an about face in US policy toward China, saying that engagement had failed and called on democracies worldwide to press China to alter its behavior and respect the rules-based international order." See Holland, "Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategy," 229, 235.

²⁴ Holland, "Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategy," 242.

²⁵ These forums include the East Asia Summit (Kawasaki, "Where does Canada fit," 230) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Holland, "Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategy," 243.)

²⁶ Martel, "a New Regional Order."

is argued, would position Canada to partake in the multilateral cooperation that is needed to deal with transnational security threats, such as climate change and pandemics, and seek diplomatic resolutions to contentious regional issues, such as SCS territorial disputes.

A key determinant for the direction the Government of Canada adopts in its Indo-Pacific strategy is the lens through which it views China: economic opportunity, or a threat to Canadian geopolitical interests and values. Canada's recent experience with hostage diplomacy and punitive trade barriers following the arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou demonstrated China's willingness to use coercive measures in its foreign relations toolbox, while highlighting fundamental differences between the two countries regarding the rule of law and human rights. While China is the largest Asian market for Canadian exports,²⁷ increasing economic dependence on China by deepening trade relations also increases Canada's vulnerability to coercive actions by an authoritarian state not bound to the same liberal democratic values as Canada. Indeed, public opinion towards China, which had been "remarkably stable" over the decade prior to 2018,²⁸ is worsening according to the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada's 2020 public opinion poll, which reported that 83% of Canadians believe that "Canada should stand up to China as our key national values are on the line."²⁹ Worsening public perceptions combined with recent actions by the Canadian Parliament to recognize Chinese genocide against the Uighur population in Xinjiang and a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing

²⁷ 2021 Canadian exports to China were valued at \$28.8B, which is approximately double the value of exports to Canada's next biggest Asian export destination, Japan, at \$14.4B. Statistics Canada, "The International Trade Explorer," last updated April 5, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2019005-eng.htm>

²⁸ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, "2020 National Opinion Poll: Canadian Views on Asia," November 25, 2020, 16, <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/2020-national-opinion-poll-canadian-views-asia>

²⁹ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, "2020 National Opinion Poll," 48.

Olympics reflect a willingness for Canada to take a more “antagonistic posture” towards China.³⁰ These indicators may suggest that the government would consider adopting a more assertive stance in recognizing the threats posed by the PRC, in alignment with US foreign policy.

Regardless of the position taken relative to the US-PRC strategic competition, pragmatic considerations concerning Canada’s resource constraints and status as a middle power necessitate that Canada astutely leverage all national instruments of power within its Indo-Pacific strategy. With the current events in Eastern Europe, demands for CAF resources for NATO commitments are unlikely to decrease in the foreseeable future, while the changing security environment may also result in increased resource demands for North American defence and Arctic sovereignty. Short of a drastic shift in government policy, the CAF’s capacity for employment in the Indo-Pacific will therefore remain limited. Instead, a Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy is more likely to feature other instruments of power more prominently, leveraging Canadian strengths in the diplomatic and economic realms, with the military playing a complementary role. Numerous engagement opportunities exist on the diplomatic front, where Canada can apply capabilities consistent with its “longstanding commitment to development, multilateralism and buttressing a rules-based order” to advance co-operation on regional security and governance challenges.³¹ On the economic front, a Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy – especially one that features a more assertive stance towards China – may seek

³⁰ Stephanie Carvin, “Choosing to Make a Choice: Canada Cautiously Steps into the Indo-Pacific,” Breaking Defence, January 20, 2022, <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/01/choosing-to-make-a-choice-canada-cautiously-steps-into-the-indo-pacific/>

³¹ Areas for multilateral cooperation include, for example, “hostage diplomacy and economic coercion, cyber and digital trade cooperation, supply chain resilience and diversification, high-standard multilateral trade promotion.” Nagy, “Indo-Pacific Resilience,” 4.

to mitigate risk by diversifying trade relations with like-minded democracies in the region, while seeking investment opportunities to address infrastructure challenges and support economic growth through the G7's B3W program. These measures would complement a deepening of Canadian relationships with important regional democracies such as Japan, South Korea, and other ASEAN members.

A Role for the CAF

Existing direction for the employment of the CAF in the Indo-Pacific is laid out in the most recent (2017) Defence Policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged (SSE)*, with subsequent updates on current focus areas contained in such documents as the annual Departmental Plan.³² In acknowledging a changing security environment in which Canada will increasingly need to “engage with emerging powers” in the Indo-Pacific, SSE commits Canada to being “a reliable player in the region, through consistent engagement and strong partnerships.”³³ The form of engagement centers on the establishment of “meaningful strategic dialogues” and continued “high-level visits and participation in regional exercises,” while the specific partnerships highlighted in SSE include long-standing FVEY members, as well as developing a “stronger relationship” with China and increasing engagement with ASEAN.³⁴ In terms of Canada's broader Indo-Pacific Strategy, the aims of strengthening defence relations with China as well as FVEY partners may prove to be at odds with each other. As commentators have pointed out, even adopting a so-called “neutral” position is likely to harm relations with our closest

³² Canada, Department of National Defence, *Departmental Plan 2021-22* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2020), <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/departmental-results-report/2021-2022/departmental-plan-2021-22.pdf>

³³ Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 57.

³⁴ Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 90.

allies in the region, particularly the US.³⁵ In contrast, strengthening relationships with the militaries of like-minded democracies and, in particular, “key regional partners such as Japan and South Korea,”³⁶ is more likely to advance Canada’s goals of increasing its regional influence through membership to the EAS and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting – Plus.³⁷ Key to enabling this is Canada’s commitment, beyond just words, to a sustained and meaningful presence in the region.

The size of Canada’s military, a lack of physical footprint near the majority of Indo-Pacific states, and military commitments elsewhere in the world are notable constraints affecting the CAF’s presence in the Indo-Pacific. While the importance of the region is acknowledged in policy documents, so too is the need to provide unwavering commitment to existing alliances and missions elsewhere in the world.³⁸ In considering how the CAF can best employ its limited resources for maximum effect as an integral part of Canada’s Indo-Pacific strategy, the capabilities of the RCN are best matched among the three environmental commands to help address the (largely maritime-based) security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, as well as complement broader defence diplomacy efforts. Indeed, CAF engagements in the region in recent years have been notably RCN-centric. Among the regional security issues matched to RCN capabilities, freedom of navigation exercises in the South and East China Seas and intelligence-gathering to enhance maritime domain awareness contribute to supporting an

³⁵ For example, see Kawasaki, “Where does Canada fit,” 227, and Holland, “Canada and the Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 242.

³⁶ Canada, Department of National Defence, *Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2020), 3.

³⁷ As per the goals cited in Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 90. As argued by Kawasaki, admission to these bodies is more likely with the direct support of key (influential) existing members. Kawasaki, “Where does Canada fit,” 228.

³⁸ Canada, *Departmental Plan*, 13.

international rules-based order in the region. RCN and Royal Canadian Air Force assets have contributed to the enforcement of United Nations Security Council Resolutions against North Korea through Operation NEON,³⁹ while Canada's participation in Operation RENDER SAFE has improved maritime safety in the Solomon Islands.⁴⁰ Against the backdrop of great power competition, a key enabler for maintaining peace and security in the region is building a high level of interoperability between allies and security partners. To this end, the RCN has regularly been engaged in the long-standing biannual Rim of the Pacific Exercise in addition to newer initiatives including Exercise Keen Sword, KAEDEX, and Operation PROJECTION, which also contributes to regional military capacity-building.⁴¹ Beyond participation in regional exercises and operations, opportunities for enhanced defence diplomacy exist through CAF leadership participation in regional military forums, and establishing an increased number of military attaché positions.⁴² The RCN can further bolster the diplomatic engagements by virtue of its presence as a "Canadian footprint" and showing the flag through strategic engagements in ports throughout the region.

³⁹ "Operation NEON," Government of Canada, National Defence, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-neon.html>

⁴⁰ "Operation RENDER SAFE," Government of Canada, National Defence, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-render-safe.html>

⁴¹ "Staying Sharp on Exercise KEEN Sword," Government of Canada, The Maple Leaf, December 7, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/maple-leaf/defence/2020/12/staying-sharp-ex-keen-sword.html> ; "Japan and Canada improve interoperability at KAEDEX," Government of Canada, Navy News, November 25, 2019, <https://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/news-operations/news-view.page?doc=japan-and-canada-improve-interoperability-at-kaedex/k3aivwma> ; "Operation PROJECTION," Government of Canada, National Defence, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-projection.html>.

⁴² Examples of forums include regional summits such as the Shangri-La Dialogue, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable, and the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue (J. Berkshire Miller, "Canada and the Indo-Pacific: A Need for a Strategic Course," Canadian Global Affairs Institute, March 2021, 4, https://www.cgai.ca/canada_and_the_indo_pacific_a_need_for_a_strategic_course) as well as the annual meeting of the US Pacific Command Chiefs of Defence Conference (Grinius, "Canada's Security Role," 1.)

While matching capabilities to threats and opportunities poises the RCN to play the lead role in the military component of a Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy, increasing the RCN's employment in the Indo-Pacific beyond its current levels would necessitate a rebalancing of operational priorities. For example, providing a high-readiness frigate on a permanent rotation with the US Seventh Fleet in the Indo-Pacific,⁴³ similar to the present commitment to NATO Standing Naval Maritime Groups in Europe, would significantly reduce the availability of RCN frigates for other regular taskings, which include deployments for capacity-building, drug interdiction, maritime security and interoperability enhancement with allies in other parts of the world. In 2017, Her Majesty's Canadian Ship *Chicoutimi* set a Canadian precedent with the first-ever *Victoria*-Class submarine deployment to Asia,⁴⁴ but heavy maintenance requirements for Canada's fleet of four submarines, combined with other operational priorities, limit the availability of submarines for this purpose on a regular basis. The RCN's ability to project power in the Indo-Pacific is further constrained by the lack of a dedicated supply ship for each of the East and West Coast-based fleets,⁴⁵ which leaves RCN assets dependent on other nations for in-theatre replenishment and unable to supply sealift capability for other CAF assets. The delivery of two Joint Support Ships will fill this gap,

⁴³ As discussed by Eric Lehre, "Canada's Approach to Pacific Security: In the Absence of a Plan, a Modest Proposal," MacDonald Laurier Institute, December 2021, 77, <https://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/indo-pacific-security-paper/>

⁴⁴ "Victoria-class Submarines," Government of Canada, Navy Fleet & Units, accessed April 22, 2022, <http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/fleet-units/submarines-home.page>

⁴⁵ Currently, RCN supply ship assets are limited to the leased *MV Asterix*, a civilian-owned and operated vessel that is not suitable for operations in high threat environments. Matthew Fisher, "The MV Asterix Delivers: Canada's Supply Ship Impresses at Sea," Canadian Global Affairs Institute, July 2018, https://www.cgai.ca/the_mv_asterix_delivers_canada_s_supply_ship_impresses_at_sea

although not until the anticipated delivery dates between 2024 and 2026.⁴⁶ The eventual entry of the Canadian Surface Combatants into the fleet will offer improved capabilities over the existing *Halifax*-Class frigates, however the delivery timeline remains uncertain. In the interim, any reprioritization of existing RCN commitments must be driven by the government's defence policy. The content of the Indo-Pacific strategy and the relative importance the government attributes to the region will determine the extent to which the RCN, and CAF more broadly, can provide sustained and meaningful contributions in the region.

Conclusion

The CAF is but one of the instruments of power that Canada will need to employ as part of a broader strategy to promote long-term stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, a region of strategic importance not only for Canada, but the global economy as a whole. This paper has argued that the employment of RCN assets in a maritime-centric approach represents the most viable option for the CAF to effectively support a Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy. Against the backdrop of US–PRC strategic competition and a complex tapestry of governance and security arrangements, Canada must find opportunities to strengthen its relationships with like-minded partners in the region to collectively advance development and security goals. Canada's diplomatic efforts in this regard can be bolstered by complementary RCN-centric military engagements undertaken on a sustained basis in value-added areas, although CAF capability and capacity limitations will require a re-focusing of priorities. The pending Indo-Pacific strategy will

⁴⁶ "Joint Support Ship," Government of Canada, Sea Defence Procurement Projects, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/procurement/joint-support-ship.html>

set the direction and extent for further CAF engagement in the Indo-Pacific to help advance regional and Canadian national interests.

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