

DE-RISKING ACTIONS

TAKEN BY THE JAPANESE IMPERIAL NAVY AHEAD OF THE BATTLE OF TSUSHIMA (27-28 May 1905)



BACKGROUND

The Battle of Tsushima was a decisive Japanese victory during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. By October 1904, Russia was losing the war against Japan in the Far East, and the Tsar decided to send the Russian Baltic Fleet as a last hope to reverse the course of the war. A fleet of 43 vessels engaged in an 8-month voyage of over 33,000 km from Europe to Asia.

In May 1905, before reaching their destination, the Russians met the entire Japanese Fleet at the Tsushima Strait. The subsequent battle resulted in the annihilation of the Russian forces: 40 vessels were sunk, captured or interned, over 5,000 officers and sailors died, and 5,000 others were made prisoners. Only 3 Russian vessels reached safety in the port of Vladivostok. The world was stunned by the first naval victory of an Asian power against an established Western empire.

HIGH RISKS FOR JAPAN

By May 1905, when the Battle of Tsushima took place, both countries were exhausted financially and had suffered massive losses of men and equipment. A Russian victory in this battle could have changed the course of the war in their favour: Russia could have taken permanent control of the sea, disrupting the movement of Japanese troops and prompting their defeat on land.

The clash at Tsushima was therefore a high-stake battle for Japan. To put it simply, the outcome of the war relied on the de-risking actions taken before the battle by the Japanese Navy and in particular by its Commander, Admiral Togo.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Both authors hold a Master's Degree in Naval History from the University of Portsmouth in the UK and believe that naval history provides lessons of risk management that are replicable to modern-day business situations.

JAPANESE LINE OF BATTLE AT TSUSHIMA



The Battle of the Sea of Japan by Tōjō Shōtarō, 1905. This work is in the public domain.

DE-RISKING ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE JAPANESE IMPERIAL NAVY

LONG-TERM MITIGATIONS

- **Adopting best practices:** The Japanese Navy was fit for purpose. It was modelled and trained by the British Royal Navy, the most capable navy of that time.
- **Early warning system:** Japan had an established network of spies that closely monitored the progress of the Russian Baltic Fleet on its way to Asia.

SHORT-TERM MITIGATIONS

- **Combat preparation:** While the Russian Baltic Fleet undertook its exhausting 33,000 km voyage to Asia, Japan invested the time repairing and preparing its fleet and conducting intensive gunnery training.
- **Effective patrolling system:** Not knowing the exact route of the Russian Baltic Fleet, Admiral Togo designed an extensive patrolling pattern that led to the detection of the enemy during the night of 27 May 1905.
- **Battle plan:** Applying learnings from previous battles, Admiral Togo developed a plan to avoid complex manoeuvres and conduct repeated attacks on the enemy concentrating fire power at short range.

The de-risking actions taken by the Japanese ahead of the Battle of Tsushima were decisive. Preparation, Anticipation and Planning were the key success factors contributing to the victory of the Japanese in one of the most conclusive battles in naval history.