



Royal Navy Strategic Studies Centre

Annual Report 2021 - 2022



April 2022



Our Role

The Royal Navy Strategic Studies Centre (RNSSC) serves as the Royal Navy's internal 'think tank' and was established in December 2019 to strengthen the conceptual component of fighting power.

The RNSSC harnesses the intellectual capital of both internal Royal Navy and external academia and think tank expertise, in order to inform strategy and policy decisions.

Our Vision

To strengthen the conceptual component of the Royal Navy's fighting power.

Our Mission

We will inform policy and strategy decisions by:

- Appraising the Royal Navy on contemporary thought
- Instilling a philosophy of critical thinking and challenge
- Harnessing the intellectual capital of our people

Reflections from the Head of the RNSSC

The past year has been one of incredible growth for the RNSSC, in terms of both people and impact. Although at our core we remain a small team of three permanent members of staff, our 'community of fellows' has developed apace so that we now have a network of around 70 people contributing ideas and work and advising us on future priorities. This has meant that we have been able to provide insight and commentary on a huge range of professionally important topics straight to the Royal Navy's senior leadership. Our role is to inform, not to decide, and we do just that. We don't provide the 'staff answer', we provide something different – an independent, challenging perspective, always based in academic rigour. If success can be said to be measured in demand, then I am pleased to say that we are not short of work.

Our work would not be possible without the close, almost symbiotic relationship we have with the Naval Historical Branch. We often work hand-in-glove with NHB researchers and historians who are expert in providing the long view. It will not surprise anyone to learn that many of the contemporary issues we face today can be better understood and better addressed with a little knowledge of history.

The coming year promises to be as exciting as the last. As knowledge of our existence and our reputation grow we have been invited to attend and to deliver papers at various events in the UK and overseas. We plan to explore some major themes in FY22/23, including the maritime contribution to the Indo-Pacific tilt, economic warfare and prosperity, and space. We will support the independent research of our Fellows, and we will continue to respond to emerging issues as the world around us demands. None of this would be possible without the team, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for what they have done this year, and what they will do next as we (hopefully!) go from strength to strength.

Dr Kevin Rowlands, Captain RN.

Our Work

Over the past year, the RNSSC has worked on many different topics, including long-term critical thinking, quick-turnaround reactive analysis, and 'red teaming' of emerging ideas and concepts. The Centre's main customer is the Navy's senior leadership who are looking for products, presentations, and events to inform the Royal Navy's strategy and policy development. However, no-one has a monopoly on good ideas and much of what we do is 'bottom up' with ideas generated from our wide network of horizon scanners and critical thinkers.



845 Naval Air Squadron's Merlin MK4 helicopters

Long Form Work

To shape our long-term programme we tackle a number of major research topics each year. Typically, these themes guide the rhythm of the term, including events, engagement, report writing, and follow-up action. In FY2021-2022 these have been:

Impact and Analysis of the 2021 Integrated Review

'Global Britain in a Competitive Age, the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy' was published in March 2021, and there quickly followed a demand to understand the implications of the strategic implications and the financial settlement for the Royal Navy.

Our Future Maritime Strategists examined the 'tilt to the Indo-Pacific' aspects of the Integrated Review at the 1SL Seapower Conference in May. They participated in a breakout session with the then First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, examining the question; *'Global Britain: What should the Royal Navy's presence in the Indo-Pacific look like beyond Carrier Strike Group 2021?'.* Presenting back conclusions, they identified four key principles for the Royal Navy's future presence in the Indo-Pacific; Informed, Targeted, Credible and Aligned. Their report also discussed aspects of seeing China as a 'challenge' rather than a 'threat'.



Hybrid break-out session at the 1SL Seapower Conference in May 2021 on the Royal Navy and the Indo-Pacific

Later in the term, an online RUSI workshop took a deep dive into the Integrated Review, the Defence Command Paper, and the Defence and Security Industrial Strategy, in order to inform a SWOT analysis being conducted by our 1SL Fellows. The Fellows then briefed their findings to 1SL, focusing on the importance of organisational culture in delivering policy direction, and to gain a good starting position to prepare for future reviews.

The Royal Navy in NATO

The Autumn's focus was on NATO and we produced our first occasional paper: 'NATO at the heart of the Royal Navy: Rhetoric or Reality?'. A series of events including a senior steering group, a RUSI workshop, and evidence gathering from the UK and allies resulted in a collection of papers which explored the RN's contribution to our cornerstone defensive alliance. Topics covered included 'thought leadership' in NATO, contributions to NATO's standing forces, the lived experience of NATO postings, and strategic communications. Submitted prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the conclusions from the occasional paper chimed with what later became hot topics and will help inform the Royal Navy's approach to the Alliance going forward.



The White Ensign flying alongside the NATO flag

The Royal Navy and the Impact of Climate Change

The third long form research project of FY21/22 was on climate change – a topic of such huge significance that we will undoubtedly visit it time and again. Understanding the impact of climate change is critical to defence. For the Royal Navy this means not only working to reduce emissions but also shaping the service to operate and respond to emerging challenges.

In September and November 2021, the Centre supported the delivery of three Naval Review webinars related to climate change; it's potential impact on the Royal Navy and how to work towards a 'Green Navy'. The RNSSC's speakers enabled lively discussions on each occasion and followed up with corresponding articles in the quarterly Naval Review magazine. The RNSSC and our Fellows also had the opportunity to red team the Royal Navy's upcoming Climate Change Strategy.

The culmination of this work was our second occasional paper. It includes critical analysis of how different peer navies are adapting to the demands of climate change, so that we might learn from best practice, and research on potential operational impacts in different scenarios. Breaking away from traditional research presentation methods, we also ventured into the realms of 'useful fiction' for the first time, exploring climate change impacts in a more dynamic and thought-provoking way that might be one method to increase focused climate literacy.

Short Form Work

Alongside our pre-planned research projects the RNSSC delivers multiple short-form reports. These reports, which are most often two-sided think-pieces, can be either responses to demand signals from the Royal Navy's senior leadership, or internally conceived notes on emerging topics of interest. The turnaround is fast and the output often sensitive and high priority.

The list below gives some examples of the range and breadth of short form papers delivered by the RNSSC and our Fellows over the past year.

- Grey-Zone warfare
- AUKUS
- SSBN transition
- Female recruitment and retention
- The maritime implications of the Russian/Ukrainian war
- Information Operation in the Russian/Ukrainian war
- Comparison of different navies approaches to capability development
- Comparison of different nations' counter migration measures
- Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific Tilt
- The regional economics of the nuclear enterprise



Visiting Fellow, Dr Alessio Palatano, and former 1SL Admiral Sir Philip Jones at the Three Admirals Talk, November 2021

'Red teaming'

Finally, another important role is offering a 'critical friend' role to the Navy and wider Defence. 'Red teaming' is examining draft concepts or papers in order to improve them, or published documents to better understand their implications. Below is a selection of recent activity.

- The Royal Navy Strategy
- The House of Commons Defence Committee Report 'We're Going to need a bigger navy'
- The British Army's Future Soldier
- The Royal Navy Prosperity Campaign
- The French Naval Staff Paper on future naval combat
- The Royal Navy Climate Change Strategy
- The Maritime Operating Concept
- UK Defence Doctrine

Events

Over the year, the RNSSC has hosted or contributed to many events, include the following.

- 1SL Sea Power Conference
- RUSI Online Integrated Review Outcome Workshop
- Future NEST 'Visioneering' Workshop
- Council on Geostrategy – Wilton Park Conference on Naval Diplomacy
- Council for Geostrategy – British Way of War book launch panel
- Losing the Long War and Tilting to the IAP, Oxford Changing Character of War Centre
- Three Admirals Talk: AUKUS at Kings College London
- RUSI NATO workshop
- Naval Review Climate Change webinar series
- Annual Chief of the Defence Staff RUSI Lecture
- Developing an Innovative Culture Workshop
- RUSI Workshop: Organisations as Complex Adaptive Systems
- RUSI Future Commando Force Workshop
- CHACR Climate Change & MoD Discussion
- IISS Military Balance 2022 launch
- NATO MarCom lecture at the Centre for Seapower & Strategy, University of Plymouth

Head of the RNSSC, Dr Rowlands, speaking at the Council of Geostrategy Conference, October 2021



Our Fellows

The RNSSC has three internal Fellowship programmes which help drive forward strategic thinking. We select high performing, motivated individuals from the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Civil Service to influence and shape future naval policy and strategy. These opportunities not only develop the individual but mean that the Royal Navy benefits from their experience, expertise, and fresh thinking.

The First Sea Lord Fellows

The 1SL Fellowship is a two-year programme for experienced individuals. As well as ad hoc reactive tasking, they follow the major research themes, providing insightful and novel perspectives. They also contribute to our monthly Strategic Digest of recommended reading, and have the opportunity to pursue their own research. April 2022 sees the first cohort of 15 Fellows halfway through their tenure and the second cohort begin their journey.



First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Ben Key



“Since joining the 1SL Fellowship in Summer 21 I have been exposed to a really unique blend of academic, military and industrial people globally. The opportunity to liaise on first name terms with very senior figures to share my experiences and ideas, and to learn from them in return has been invaluable.” – CPO Peter Spayne RN



“The 1SL Fellowship has not only provided an excellent opportunity to meet and engage with people from across the fleet, there are numerous opportunities to join workshops, participate in discussions, sign up for short courses and work as part of a small team on focused questions that 1SL is interested in reading.” – Cdr Tracy MacSephney RN



“The Fellows are an amazing community, some of the sharpest and most varied minds in the Whole Force, and working with them to tackle the big issues is as humbling as it is exciting, every time.” – Lt Oliver Johnson RN

Future Maritime Strategists

Twenty-four talented early career individuals from the Royal Navy, Civil Service, industry and universities were chosen to support the Seapower Conference in May 2021. Following on from the success of the research and workshop on the Tilt to the Indo-Pacific, these Strategists were encouraged to continue to work with the RNSSC. The second cohort of 17 selected strategists commenced their one year membership in April 2022 and, building on the successes of the first year, will have a tailored professional development programme.

One of the highlights of the year was Strategist Will Parker winning RUSI's Trench Gascoigne Essay prize with his essay entitled 'Winning Without Fighting in the Indo-Pacific'. Will, who at the time was a student at the University of Exeter, and is now an Officer Cadet at BRNC Dartmouth, had this to say about winning the award:

"...this has only been possible due to the opportunities presented by the RNSSC. April's work placement, May's break-out Q&A session with First Sea Lord at the IISS Seapower Conference, and other Future Maritime Strategist events; have helped equip me with the drive and ability to think and communicate on the big questions confronting the RN."



Will Parker receiving his award from Admiral Sir Tony Radakin

Associate Fellows

This programme is individually tailored, but broadly falls into two groups. Fellows who are undertaking Royal Navy or Ministry of Defence-sponsored postgraduate research in relevant sea power and maritime defence topics, and individuals who were previously on one of the other Fellowship programmes and wish to stay engaged. The Associate Fellows contribute to the RNSSC through their own research interests while benefitting from the Centre's resources, network, and programme of events.

This year, Maj Gen Ewen Murchison RM and Cdr Andrew Livsey RN have been the Royal Navy's Hudson Fellows at the University of Oxford, Capt Dusan Uhrin RM has been the Mountbatten Fellow at the University of Cambridge, and Cdr Stephen Walton has followed the MStrat programme at the University of Exeter. A previous Hudson Fellow and now an active Associate, Captain Chris O'Flaherty RN published a biography of wartime hero Commander Derek 'Jake' Wright, titled 'Torpedoes, Tea, and Medals' - all proceeds of sales go directly to the Coastal Forces Heritage Trust.

Our Outreach

Partner Organisations

The Centre is pleased to lead the Royal Navy's relationship with external think-tanks such as the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). We have collaborated on many successful events in the year. RUSI has started producing a quarterly Seapower Digest specifically tailored for the Royal Navy. The first edition covered the role of the Royal Navy, opportunities of uncrewed systems, Russia's Black Sea Fleet, and lessons from Exercise Green Dagger. You can read the Digests on our website. We also have a close relationship with the Naval Review, the UK's century-old independent journal for naval professionals, with the Head of the RNSSC sitting on its governing committee.



Across the Ministry of Defence, the RNSSC has also established close links with the Navy and RAF equivalent organisations. The Army's Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research (CHACR) has provided superb collaboration opportunities, including a discussion group on climate security. Conversations are ongoing with the Freeman Air and Space Institute to collaborate on future research of mutual interest, such as the maritime implications of space.

The RNSSC has only been established for just over two years and is constantly looking to develop its partnerships across the defence community, including opportunities to collaborate on work and events. Our relationship with the Australian Seapower Centre is burgeoning, and similar opportunities are being explored with other partner navies.



HMS Prince of Wales leads Exercise Cold Response as NATO Command Ship

Visiting Fellows

In February 2022, the RNSSC's first academic partners were formally invited to start as Visiting Fellows. The intention is to have a cross-section of scholars with a range of subject area expertise who will work with us on policy and strategy development, mentoring, and advising. Despite not officially starting the role until April, several Visiting Fellows have already contributed important research to the RNSSC. We are very pleased to have the following experts working with us.

Dr Sophy Antrobus	Research Associate with the Freeman Air and Space Institute, Kings College London	Specialism: Contemporary air power and barriers to innovation
Dr Tim Benbow	Reader in Strategic Studies, Kings College London	Specialism: Naval strategy and history, changing character of war and future warfare
Dr David Blagden	Senior Lecturer in International Security, University of Exeter	Specialism: Nuclear strategy, navies and sea power, causes and consequences of the rise of new great powers
Dr Duncan Depledge	Lecturer in Geopolitics and Security, Loughborough University	Specialism: Changing geopolitics of the Arctic and its implications for foreign and defence in Europe
Dr Richard Hammond	Senior Lecturer in War Studies, Brunel University London	Specialism: The history of warfare, 1919-45
Dr Matthew Heaslip	Lecturer in Naval History, University of Portsmouth	Specialism: The application of naval power in littoral environments

Professor Beatrice Heuser	Professor of International Relations, University of Glasgow	Specialism: Strategic studies of war, including why it is waged
Professor Greg Kennedy	Professor of Strategic Foreign Policy, Kings College London	Specialism: strategic foreign policy, maritime defence, disarmament, diplomacy and intelligence
Dr Ziya Meral	Director Research and Programmes, Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research	Specialism: Religious violence in Africa and the Middle East
Dr David Morgan-Owen	Senior Lecturer, Kings College London	Specialism: British strategy-making and strategic thought in the nineteenth and twentieth century
Dr Fotios Moustakis	Associate Professor of Strategic Studies, Director of the Centre for Seapower and Strategy, University of Plymouth	Specialism: Terrorism, European Security
Professor Phillips O'Brien	Professor of Strategic Studies, University of St Andrews	Specialism: American defence strategy
Professor Alessio Patalano	Professor of War and Strategy in East Asia.	Specialism: Maritime strategy and doctrine, East-Asian security
Dr Deborah Saunders	Reader in Defence and Security Studies, Kings College London	Specialism: Security issues in the Black Sea
Dr Claire Yorke	Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, Syddansk Universitet Denmark	Specialism: International affairs, diplomacy, strategy, leadership and policy-making

Our Advisory Committee

This year the RNSSC set up an Advisory Committee, chaired by the Royal Navy's Director of Strategy and Policy. Leading figures from related spheres have been asked to offer their expertise to support the direction of work and maximise the impact of the Centre.

The inaugural meeting was held on 22 March 2022 in the Admiralty Board Room in Whitehall. It was an opportunity to introduce the Committee members to the RNSSC, its mission, structure and current work. An in-depth conversation was held about direction, with the Committee able to offer their suggestions and advice for the future work of the Centre. We are pleased to be joined by:



James Goldrick

James Goldrick AO, CSC is a retired Rear Admiral of the Royal Australian Navy. He joined the Royal Australian Navy as a 15 year old Cadet-Midshipman in 1974 and retired in 2012. He commanded HMA ships Cessnock and Sydney (twice), the RAN task group and the multinational maritime interception force in the Persian Gulf (2002) and the Australian Defence Force Academy (2003-2006). As a Rear Admiral, he led Australia's Border Protection Command (2006-2008) and then commanded the Australian Defence College (2008-2011).



Mary Hardy

Mary Hardy is an experienced non-executive director and Audit & Risk Committee Chair having worked in both public and private sectors. She was previously on the Board of the Royal Navy for six years and chaired their Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and has been appointed Honorary Captain in the Royal Naval Reserve.



Dr Paul Little

Honorary Captain Dr Paul Little RNR has a 42-year naval background with the UK Coastguard, US Coastguard, Merchant Navy combining this with a distinguished 35-year Academic career in tertiary education. He is a Global expert, Thought leader and System leader in technological and professional education and skills. He is a Fellow of Scotland's Learned Academy (FRSE), Fellow of: the Royal Society of Arts, and Fellow of the Nautical Institute as well as a Younger Brother of Trinity House (London).



Frank Miller

The Honorable Franklin Miller is a principal at the Scowcroft Group in Washington, DC. He dealt extensively with nuclear policy and nuclear arms control issues during his 31-year government career, which included senior positions in the Defense Department and on the NSC staff. He was directly in charge of US nuclear deterrence and targeting policy from 1985 to 2001 and also chaired NATO's senior nuclear policy committee, the High-Level Group, from 1997 to 2001. He served as a surface warfare officer from 1972 to 1975. In 2006, Mr Miller was awarded an honorary knighthood by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for his contributions to US-UK relations.



Mr Ajay Sharma

Previously, Mr Ajay Sharma was Her Majesty's Ambassador to the State of Qatar from 2015 to 2020, and is currently working on finding a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution to the Cyprus problem. He earlier served as the Iran Coordinator in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and in the UK team which negotiated the Iran nuclear deal. He reopened the British Embassy in Tehran in August 2015. He has had previous diplomatic postings in Ankara, Moscow and Paris. He was appointed a Companion of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George in 2016.



Ruth Smeeth

Ruth Smeeth is a British Labour Party politician and was Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent North from 2015 to 2019. During her time in the Commons, Ruth took particular interest in defence procurement and industry. She is now Chief Executive of Index on Censorship, a not-for-profit organisation championing freedom of speech. Since July 2021, Ruth has been an Honorary Captain in the Royal Naval Reserve.



Baroness Gisela Stuart

The Rt Hon Gisela Stuart is the lead Non-executive Board Member for the Cabinet Office, and RN Honorary Officer. She served as the Labour Member of Parliament for Birmingham Edgbaston from 1997 until 2017, during which time she was a Health Minister (1999-2001) and member of the Intelligence and Security Select Committee (2015-17). She was formerly co-Chair of Vote Leave and is currently the Chair of Wilton Park, an executive agency of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Our Team

The RNSSC is a small team who are committed to 'Building a Thinking Navy'. They drive forward research and initiatives to enable the wider Community of Fellows to research and analyse the topics important for the Royal Navy.



Dr Kevin Rowlands, Head of the RNSSC

Kevin joined the team in September 2021 after a career in uniform. His core roles are engagement with academia and think tanks, and delivering the programme of research. Kevin has previous experience as a warfare officer in the RN working in single service, joint, and international assignments. His own interests include naval strategy short of war, and education for all.



Mary Thompson, Fellowships Officer

Mary has been working for the team since October 2021, having transferred from being a researcher in the Naval Historical Branch. Her core role in the RNSSC is to coordinate the 1SL Fellowship and Future Maritime Strategists programme. Mary has previous experience in two other government departments, and has a particular interest in promoting Diversity and Inclusion.



Hannah Antrobus, Business Manager and Administrator

Hannah joined the RNSSC in February 2021. Having previously worked for the majority of her professional life in NATS. Hannah has a background in business, communications and project management. Her core role is to support the team to deliver an efficient and enduring programme by providing continuity to business support functions.

Contact Us

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HMS Queen Elizabeth returns to Portsmouth in December 2021 following her maiden operational deployment to the Indo-Pacific



HMS Protector on deployment in the Antarctic



