



## Strategic Digest

October 2021

### Upcoming RNSSC Events

- 10 November TBC 1200-1300: **Three Admirals on AUKUS.** Event hosted online by KCL, delivered in conjunction with RNSSC and Sea Power Centre, Australia. Details soon.
- 15 November 1230-1730: **NATO Workshop** hosted by RUSI, London or online. Please RSVP by 31 Oct to the [mailbox](#).
- 24 November TBC 1000-1730: **Future Commando Force Workshop** hosted by RUSI. Details soon.
- 25 November TBC 1730-1900: **Future Maritime Strategists Naval Review debate.** Details soon.

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Contact us:  
[NavyStratPol-](#)  
[RNSSC@mod.gov.uk](mailto:RNSSC@mod.gov.uk)

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The Royal Navy Strategic Studies Centre (RNSSC) is pleased to be sharing the first edition of its Strategic Digest; a monthly collection of relevant and thought-provoking articles and podcasts. The Digest aims to keep the Royal Navy (RN) abreast of global strategic developments and promote critical thinking. Topics have been selected due to their relevance to recent or upcoming events, and if they contain newly published innovative thought. October saw continued reaction to AUKUS, further commentary on the threats new technology poses, and negotiations on the UK supplying weapons to Ukraine. The final article provides up-to-date analysis on recent events in Libya highlighting the utility of OSINT.

This first edition has been sent to the RN's senior leadership team, with the request to **please cascade**. If you would like to be added to the mailing list please send an email via the 'Subscribe' button on the left-hand side.



### On AUKUS...

#### 'Research Briefing: The AUKUS Agreement', The House of Common's Library

Link: [Read here](#)

This briefing gives a good, and carefully non-political, overview of the Agreement including reaction from and implications for relevant countries. It is a recommended starting point for understanding the potential impact of AUKUS.

With thanks to Stephen Prince, Naval Historical Branch.

#### 'The US-Australian alliance needs a strategy to deter China's gray-zone coercion', Ashley Townshend, Thomas Lonergan and Toby Warden

Link: [Read here](#)

Written from a US standpoint, this article argues that the US and Australia must work together now to counter Chinese sub-threshold aggression in the Indo-Pacific, rather than waiting for the late 2030s when the agreed nuclear-powered submarines will be commissioned. An interesting read, which the UK noticeably gets almost no mention in. With thanks to Commander René Balletta, RN.

#### 'What Europeans think about the US-China Cold War', Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard

Link: [Read here](#)

A very different take from other pieces on AUKUS, the European Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFR) uses public opinion polls to explore EU foreign policy concepts and countries' desires to stay neutral. The article is based around the concept that the US and allies are currently in a cold war with both Russia and China.

With thanks to Dr Ed Hampshire, Naval Historical Branch.

### On the Threats of Developing Technology...

**‘The Standstill Conundrum: The Advent of Second-Strike Vulnerability and Options to Address It’, Rose Gottemoeller**

Link: [Read here](#)

A blog post from the US which questions whether emerging and disruptive technologies are making nuclear second-strike capabilities unfeasible. The ability to detect and track mobile missile systems, including SSBNs, render them vulnerable and put their mission at risk. This is particularly key for nuclear powers with small second-strike deterrence postures, such as the UK and France.

With thanks to Captain Kevin Rowlands, RN.

**‘Can’t Sail Away from Cyber Attacks: “Sea-hacking” from Land’, Chris Demchak and Michael Thomas**

Link: [Read here](#)

Hacking now poses a danger to both commercial and military vessels. This article outlines some of the potential threats, focusing on implications to ‘maritime chokepoints’ such as the Suez Canal.

With thanks to Major Simon Ward, RM.

**‘When we nearly nuked the moon’, Dan Snow**

Link: [Podcast details here](#)

A light-hearted and thought-provoking interview about some of the whackiest plans and innovations in the defence and intelligence sectors over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including an appearance from the Royal Navy.

With thanks to Lieutenant Oliver Johnson, RN.

On China and Technology...

**‘The PLA and Intelligent Warfare: A Preliminary Analysis’, Kevin Pollpeter and Amanda Kerrigan**

Link: [Read here](#)

The West is not alone in grappling with AI and autonomous weapons systems. China is developing a concept of ‘intelligent warfare’ in which the future battlefield is dominated by data. In this report the CNA use Chinese source material and articles to paint a picture of how intelligent warfare is characterised and envisioned, and what the implications for the West might be. The executive summary is useful if short on time.

With thanks to Captain Kevin Rowlands, RN.

On Russia’s New Weapons...

**‘Putting the Russian Hypersonic Threat in Perspective’, Sidharth Kaushal**

Link: [Read here](#)

This short article argues that the recent Russian testing of the 3M22 Zircon cruise missile should not be overstated, and that it is more of a peace-time tool to further competition.

With thanks to Commander René Balletta, RN.

On NATO Membership...

**‘What is the final destination for Ukraine’s NATO/EU path?’, Christine Karelska Pavlo Vugelman**

Link: [Read here](#)

On 20<sup>th</sup> October [media reports](#) emerged of bilateral talks on the UK supplying Brimstone surface-to-surface and air-to-surface missiles to Ukraine. This follows on from the [Babcock tripartite agreement](#) in June to lead on the delivery of the Ukrainian Naval Capabilities Enhancement Programme (UNCEP). Vugelman’s article provides a

good overview of Ukraine's aspirations and what steps it has (or has not) taken towards being a viable NATO and EU member since 2014.  
With thanks to CPO Daniel Dean, RN.

**'TAG V-Conference: Are NATO and Turkey Compatible?', Julian Lidley-French**

Link: [Read here](#)

A short, pithy article about the values vs interests dichotomy western NATO members have with Turkey. Lidley-French argues there is no solution but in the final paragraphs suggests a number of mitigating actions to manage the awkward relationship.  
With thanks to Commander Paul Ottewell, RN.

On the Situation in Libya...

**'Inside Libya', Konrad Adenauer Foundation**

Link: [Read here](#)

This report from open source intelligence provides a good appraisal of the deteriorating political situation in Libya in the lead up to its presidential election in December. The executive summary on page 3 gives a quick, though concerning, understanding.  
With thanks to Captain Chris O'Flaherty, RN.