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## Strategic Digest

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March 2022

The RNSSC's Strategic Digest is 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. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine continues to produce literature around Western and Chinese military strategies, and this month's edition has a second, interlinked, focus on maritime security and the future role of the world's navies.

The Digest is sent to the RN's senior leadership team, with the request to **please cascade**. To contact us with articles for future editions, feedback or to be added to the mailing list please send an email to [NavyStratPol-RNSSC@mod.gov.uk](mailto:NavyStratPol-RNSSC@mod.gov.uk).



### On Ukraine...

#### **'The First Phase of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine 2022', Dr Rob Johnson**

Link: [Read here](#)

Johnson writes about the prelude to the invasion, the tactical-operational dimension, and Russian, Western and Chinese calculations in regard to the war and actions taken so far. With thanks to Commander Andrew Livsey, RN.

#### **'The Last Word - Strategy Professor: Russia "overestimated what they could do" in Ukraine', MSNBC**

Link: [Watch here](#)

RNSSC Visiting Fellow Professor Philips O'Brien, University of St Andrews, joins Lawrence O'Donnell to talk about his assessment of what is going wrong for Russian troops in Ukraine. With thanks to Captain Kevin Rowlands, RNSSC.

#### **'Why Can't the West Admit That Ukraine Is Winning?', Eliot A. Cohen**

Link: [Read here](#)

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Cohen, argues that rather than just blocking Russia, Ukraine is likely to be winning and explores why there might be a Western academic and analytical reluctance to accept this.

With thanks to Stephen Prince, Naval Historical Branch.

#### **'Russia forces appear to be on the cusp of 'culminating' in Ukraine. Here's what that could mean for both nations', Mick Ryan**

Link: [Read here](#)

A useful overview and explanation of the position both sides find themselves in a month into the conflict.

With thanks to Stephen Prince, Naval Historical Branch.

### On wider implications from the Russo-Ukrainian War...

### **‘We need a more realistic strategy for the post-Cold War era’, Robert Gates**

Link: [Read here](#)

Writing in the Washington Post, ex-US Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, makes the case for a new American defence strategy which recognises a global struggle of indeterminate strength against two great powers simultaneously; China and Russia. He argues any strategy should be underpinned by a bigger, more powerful and technologically advanced military.

With thanks to Brigadier Duncan Forbes, RM.

### **‘The Russo-Ukrainian War and the UK integrated Review’, Paul Cornish**

Read here: [Read here](#)

A ‘candid friend’ article with strong arguments about where the IR fell short and which areas UK defence needs to develop, namely that reducing conventional deterrence and focusing on digital warfare might prove to be a mistake. He cases Ukraine to make the case for both.

With thanks to Lieutenant Colonel Innes Catton, RM.

### **‘2022: Europe At War, World in Crisis – The Year Geopolitics Changed?’, Global Strategy Forum**

Link: [Watch here](#) (on personal device)

Rt Hon Jack Straw converses with Lord Mark Sedwill on reactions and implications from the conflict in Ukraine, including NATO, Russia, China, and cyber and energy security.

With thanks to Rear Admiral Iain Lower, RN.

### **‘Putin Misunderstands History. So, Unfortunately Does the U.S.’, Niall Ferguson**

Link: [Read here](#)

This opinion piece looks at some of the Western interventions in the Ukraine conflict, arguing that Biden is mistaken to be trying to “bleed Russia dry” and that allowing the war to continue will not undermine Putin’s position.

With thanks to Captain Kevin Rowlands, RNSSC.

### On China and Russo-Ukrainian War...

#### **‘Possible Outcomes of the Russo-Ukrainian War and China’s Choice’, Hu Wei**

Link: [Read here](#)

Wei sets out possible outcomes of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and how it has impacted the international geopolitical landscape, in order to assess China’s options for future strategy and how it could play the situation to its advantage.

With thanks to Captain Kevin Rowlands, RN.

#### **‘China’s difficult balancing act in Russia – Ukraine Crisis’, Meia Nouwens**

Link: [Read here](#)

This IISS analysis piece covers similar territory to the article above, while diving deeper into Chinese criticism at home and the Taiwan element.

With thanks to Captain Kevin Rowlands, RN.

### On Maritime Security and the Role of Navies...

#### **‘Not so disruptive after all: The 4IR, navies and the search for sea control’, Ian Bowers and Sarah Kirchberger**

Link: [Read here](#)

Using the term ‘fourth industrial revolution’ (4IR) to be the widespread introduction of IA and similar technology, Bowers and Kirchberger ask a very interesting question about the impact of uncrewed systems and pervasive surveillance on maritime operations. They conclude that while much detail will change, the fundamentals of what navies can do will alter less.

With thanks to Commander Andrew Livsey, RN.

#### **‘It’s a navy’s job, only a navy can do it! Understanding and Addressing Western Neglect of Maritime Trade Protection’, Lieutenant Comander Matthijs Ooms**

Link: [Read here](#)

A particularly relevant article given the losses of merchant ships in the Black Sea during the current Russia-Ukrainian War. It includes wider suggestions about intercepting Russian trade, and possible action by and against China should they make an attempt to take Taiwan. The title is misleading, of course, for trade defence is an airforce job as well.

With thanks to Commander Andrew Livsey, RN.

**\*In case you missed it\***

**‘UNCLOS: the law of the sea in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’, House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee**

Link: [Read here](#)

UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) was agreed 40 years ago, and this inquiry assesses whether it is still fit for purpose. Recommendations for the government and partners were; to address regulatory gaps from emerging challenges such as climate change, to provide supplementation of UNCLOS through new international agreements, to do more to uphold key principles of UNCLOS, and to continue to advocate for the protection of the marine environment.

With thanks to Commander Andrew Livsey, RN.

**‘Geneva Declaration on Human Rights at Sea’, Human Rights at Sea**

Link: [Read here](#)

Published at the beginning of the month, it aims to raise global awareness of human rights abuses at sea and to generate a concerted international response which ensures an effective remedy for those who were abused. The document provides examples of different human rights abuses which take place at sea, applicable human rights articles and guidelines for promoting compliance.

With thanks to Commander Andrew Livsey, RN.

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