



Royal United Services Institute  
for Defence and Security Studies

# Annual Report 2021–22



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## **191 years of independent thinking on defence and security**

The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) is the world's oldest and the UK's leading defence and security think tank. Its mission is to inform, influence and enhance public debate on a safer and more stable world. RUSI is a research-led institute, producing independent, practical and innovative analysis to address today's complex challenges.

Since its foundation in 1831, RUSI has relied on its members to support its activities. Together with revenue from research, publications and conferences, RUSI has sustained its political independence for 191 years.

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# 2021–22 Overview

Over the past year, we have witnessed some of the most significant geopolitical changes in decades. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have fundamentally challenged many assumptions that have underpinned the defence and security policies of the UK and its allies.

This rapidly evolving landscape makes our mission more important than ever – to be a world-leading independent forum for informing and improving policy and public debate on defence, security and international affairs. Unprecedented demand for RUSI's insights indicates that our influence and impact have never been higher.

Over the last fiscal year, we were cited in more than 50,000 news and comment pieces in international media and our experts have been regularly featured in the most influential news and information outlets across the globe.

We have grown our social media following substantially, including a 20% annual increase on Twitter. Our redeveloped website has attracted more than 2 million users (+90%) and more than 4 million unique page views (+70%). This increase can be directly linked to interest in our commentary and insights relating to Ukraine, with around half of the web traffic for the year coming in the five weeks between Russia's invasion and 31 March. We have also increased the number of Commentary pieces to meet this demand.

We directly engage with and influence officials in legislative bodies, governments and international organisations, as well as non-governmental actors.

In the UK, RUSI experts presented to Parliamentary Committees and All-Party Parliamentary Groups, and our recommendations can be seen in the government's National Cyber and Defence Industrial Strategy. Our report for the Home Office on tackling financial crime related to the illegal wildlife trade was recognised by the Head of the National Wildlife Crime Unit as a big step towards getting 'the illegal wildlife trade viewed for the serious and significant crime type that it is'.

Internationally, we maintain a presence at major international gatherings, Davos, Doha, the Munich Security Forum and many more. Our experts have led engagements as diverse as presenting to NATO on air and missile defence; contributing to US Congressional reports on Russia and Ukraine; running roundtable discussions for the G7 on cyber security and economic resilience; and providing a suite of global actions to address the security risks and humanitarian challenges posed by foreign terrorist fighters in Syria.

Our influence is the result of the deep expertise and the relationships that we hold. In early 2022, two of our land warfare experts spent the weeks preceding the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Their engagements with combatants, reporters and diplomats prior to the invasion ultimately led to several influential commentary pieces and the publication of a special report, 'Operation Z'. One of our most read papers, it generated news coverage worldwide and even informed the *Guardian's* questioning of the prime minister during interviews.

We believe one of the most important roles we serve is to promote debate and provide a platform for considering new ideas. Our convening power remains strong. From former prime ministers Sir Tony Blair and Tony Abbott to the Commander of the Indo-Pacific Command Admiral John C Aquilino and the Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, our speakers and events set the agenda and influence thinking.

However, the coronavirus pandemic has limited our ability to hold in-person events in 2021–22, and appears to have fundamentally altered how delegates wish to participate in events in the long term. Building on the lessons we learned in the previous year, we have maintained a busy online and hybrid events schedule.

Online access allowed us to welcome more than 15,000 attendees to RUSI events in the past year, including over 1,000 to one event on Ukraine. Attendees from 174 different countries reflect our truly global reach. For the first time, we have had more visits to our website from a single country other than the UK, with the number of visits from users based in the US (582,000) narrowly exceeding visits from UK users (574,000).

At its core, RUSI is a membership organisation, and it is only through membership that all our events, as well as the full range of our analysis and publications, can be accessed. Despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic, we have made further improvements to our processes and service levels, widening our range of online events, improving our member communications and extending our outreach activities. The result of these improvements is a widening membership base – growing individual memberships by 11% and organisational membership by 23% in the 12-month reporting period.

Our work continues to win awards and plaudits. In February, as well as being shortlisted in the Democracy and Law category, we were recognised with the Foreign Affairs Award in Prospect Magazine's 20th Annual Think Tank Awards. The award commended RUSI for our study tracking the UK's Integrated Review on Security, Defence and Foreign Policy. At the time, this analysis informed the policymaking process in the run-up to the Integrated Review and was acknowledged by then Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab in the House of Commons in September 2020. We led the subsequent national conversation on the UK's nuclear weapons programme with briefings to Parliament and the media.

The achievements described in this summary are the result of the hard work of everyone employed by and associated with RUSI – and that is a growing family. We now have 115 employees working for our UK registered charity, up from 102 a year earlier. This growth, especially in the proportion of our employees dedicated to research, reflects increased demand for our expertise and leaves us even better placed to fulfil research briefs in the coming years.

Attracting exceptional talent will remain a priority, as well as helping all our existing employees to realise their potential. To do this and to enhance the impact, effectiveness and relevance of our work we have developed a new Diversity, Equality and Inclusivity Strategy. Employee-owned and developed with direct input from more than a third of our staff, the strategy aims to improve our overall diversity, equality and inclusivity in every aspect of our work.

To fulfil our mission and help build a safer UK and a more secure, equitable and stable world, we must remain in a strong financial position. The year 2021–22 has been an excellent year in that regard. We have reached our initial goal to secure £10 million for the redevelopment of our 61 Whitehall home, to which we will return in 2023. Crucially, more than 70% of this £10 million has now been received, putting the project on the strongest of footings. In the next financial year, a second phase of fundraising will seek an additional £3.5 million to truly cement RUSI's place as a world-leading independent forum for defence, security and international affairs.

# Our Research

RUSI is organised around nine research groups, each made up of multidisciplinary specialists. As well as over 50 in-house analysts and experts, we have an extensive network of associates and consultants. Across the groups and RUSI International, here are some of the areas where our impact and influence have been most notable in 2021–22.

## CENTRE FOR FINANCIAL CRIME AND SECURITY STUDIES

Our Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies (CFCS) is a leading authority on the intersection of finance and security.

Throughout 2021–22 we have provided insight and created public understanding on sanctions and economic crime. Our researchers are trusted experts, frequently sought out by outlets such as the *BBC*, *Financial Times*, *Guardian* and *The Times*. This has never been truer than after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Our experts have been regularly called upon by media and policymakers to help understand and shape the economic response to the conflict.

Beyond this, policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic have engaged with CFCS on a wide range of topics:

- We provided oral evidence to the UK Treasury Select Committee on economic crime; to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee on central bank digital currencies; to the UK Foreign Affairs Committee on Russia-related sanctions; and to the UN Security Council on terrorist-financing threats.
- We established the Taskforce on a Transatlantic Response to Illicit Finance (TARIF) in June 2021 to identify ways in which the US and the UK can lead in the global fight on illicit finance. We have held policy briefings with government officials from both sides of the Atlantic, including President Joe Biden's Summit for Democracy team.
- We advised two UK Parliamentary Committees following the appointment as Specialist Advisors of two of our researchers. Kathryn Westmore is supporting the House of Lords Fraud Act Committee and Tom Keatinge is working on illicit finance with the Foreign Affairs Committee. These roles are ongoing.



Notable recognition for our team's work came from Regulation Asia. Our training workshops, delivered to participants from across government and industry on five continents, received their 2021 Excellence Award for Compliance Training Provider of the Year.

## **CYBER**

Our Cyber research group analyses UK and international strategic responses to cyber challenges.

We seek to understand, identify and interpret the impact of these challenges on governments, companies and citizens, and we are strengthening our focus on this area as part of our wider strategic plan. Our ability to clearly communicate complex and technical information relating to cyber and technology to non-technical audiences is core to our vision of informing and improving policy and public debate in this area.

The strength of our network and the impact of our researchers are both clear to see. In 2021–22, the following were achieved:

- We contributed to UK government positioning and policy. Our work on international cyber capacity building has helped government decide which regions and interventions to focus on in the next three years and beyond. Similarly, the UK's National Cyber Strategy 2022 has centred on a whole-of-society approach to cyber, one of the key recommendations we submitted in our paper 'Five Principles for the Next UK Cyber Strategy'.
- We shaped international thinking through the G7. We spoke at the G7 Extraordinary Summit on Ransomware, setting out a range of policy options for the G7 to consider. We also hosted events to discuss advanced technology and economic resilience. This included a roundtable with the Cabinet Office and Lord Mark Sedwill, Chair of the G7 Panel on Economic Resilience, ahead of the 2021 G7 summit.
- We convened senior officials from the Five Eyes community. Highlighting the importance of diversity in addressing the challenges and opportunities of the global cyber race, we hosted a Five Eyes event on 'Responsible Cyber Power'.

## **DEFENCE, INDUSTRIES AND SOCIETY**

Our Defence, Industries and Society outputs are dedicated to addressing the defence management agenda, focusing on acquisition, supply chain management and the place of defence in society.

Led by Professor Trevor Taylor, the influence of the thought leadership produced by the Defence, Industries and Society group can be seen in the Ministry of Defence's 2021 Industrial Strategy. This advances many of the arguments RUSI has put forward in recent years.

Our ongoing influence in this area can be seen in Trevor's appointments to the Policy Advisory Board of MAKE UK (Defence) and as an adviser to the Armament Industry European Research Group in Paris. Trevor also serves as an active Editorial Board member of the Defense Acquisition Review published by the US National Defense University.

## **INTERNATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES**

Our International Security Studies (ISS) research group maps and analyses the impact on international security of geopolitical cooperation, competition and conflict in the most strategically important regions of the world.

Since 2017, ISS has maintained a unique UK–Russia expert security dialogue. This has provided a channel to explore ways to de-escalate confrontation and to examine how arms control, confidence-building mechanisms and discussions on strategic stability could reduce risks in the bilateral security relationship. In February 2022, a RUSI delegation travelled to Moscow to set out to high-level Russian interlocutors the enormous costs and risks associated with an attack on Ukraine and potential alternatives. Unfortunately, the delegation was met by a Russian leadership that was not open to a peaceful resolution to the conflict and determined instead to pursue a military course. This collaboration has been put on hold.

In October 2021, we launched the European Security in Transformation programme, which analyses the geopolitical developments transforming the contemporary European security environment and their impact on the UK. The first report from the programme is a study into ad-hoc European military cooperation outside European borders.

The past year has also seen the conclusion of our Transatlantic Dialogue on China, a study aimed at increasing understanding in the US and Europe of perceptions of and responses to a rising China. The Dialogue has produced policy sector-specific publications, including a report on the 'global commons' (shared domains such as space and international waters), as well as guest commentaries and podcasts.

## **MILITARY SCIENCES**

Our Military Sciences group provides thought leadership on the use of military force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from strategic concepts to technical platforms. Our team includes experts in all domains from air and land to sea, space and cyber.

The group's work furthers a contemporary understanding of conflict to shape defence policies. We do this by drawing on the widest possible network of connections and the deepest understanding of historical evidence bases.

Over 2021–22, demand for our expertise in military science has never been greater. Our researchers have been ever-present in international media, informing the public discourse on major developments, in particular the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

From our flagship Land Warfare Conference to workshops, roundtables and publications, our Military Sciences group has brought together military, academia and industry practitioners throughout the last year to shape thinking on issues at the forefront of strategy and defence. Our connections with military staff colleges help shape professional military education on every continent.

Significant outputs from the team's work over the past 12 months include:

- The Red Team Project – a ground-breaking, in-depth analysis of the militaries of the UK's major competitors and adversaries.
- Greening Defence – a response to the UK Ministry of Defence's Climate Change and Sustainability Strategic Approach, looking at how the defence sector can tackle climate change and sustainability.
- Operation Z – informed by an on-the-ground presence in Ukraine in the weeks preceding the war, this engagement with combatants, reporters and diplomats examines how Russian policy and courses of action are being influenced by the challenges encountered in Ukraine.

We are also shaping the UK's understanding of space. Through engagement with policymakers (inside and outside defence), industry and opinion formers, our work is redefining the understanding of what the domain enables. It includes the successful fortnightly 'War in Space' podcast series.

## **OPEN SOURCE INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS**

Our recently established Open Source Intelligence Analysis (OSIA) research group carries out cutting-edge open source and geospatial intelligence and analytics on a range of topics related to national security and defence. From North Korea's overseas procurement and proliferation networks to Russia's ongoing military activities, we seek to leverage new technologies and techniques to generate actionable and insightful intelligence on contemporary security issues.

Our work on North Korea, known as Project Sandstone, is the most publicly visible output from OSIA. In the past 12 months the team has contributed to the disruption of North Korea's illicit activities. We are currently working on a major investigation linked

to North Korea's oil procurement operations, and our research was cited extensively by the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea in their annual report detailing sanctions evasion activity. This work has also been used by the *New York Times* in an award-winning visual investigation into the topic.

Our research has been cited in the UK's first national risk assessment of proliferation financing, and OSIA team members have been called upon to present to a range of major actors in national and international defence and security, including: the G7+; the Pentagon; the FBI and US State Department; and the UK's Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs Select Committee.

## **ORGANISED CRIME AND POLICING**

Our Organised Crime and Policing research group provides research, analysis, and technical and evaluation services for governments, law enforcement agencies, international institutions and the private sector on a wide range of organised crime and policing issues that impact the UK and other countries.

In 2021–22 we have undertaken activity as diverse as giving evidence to the House of Lords Home Affairs Select Committee on international law enforcement cooperation post-Brexit and conducting research on the impacts of Covid-19 on human trafficking in Sudan. This work, part of a group led by Nottingham University's Rights Lab, shone a light on a humanitarian crisis through the publication of a detailed report which made policy and operational recommendations, and was supported with a launch event that featured the voices of some of the victims of this crime.

As part of our wildlife and environmental crime portfolio we have:

- Provided key inputs to the Financial Action Task Force report 'Money Laundering from Environmental Crime', which called for increased risk awareness of illicit financial flows associated with environmental crime, including in countries without domestic resources to tackle the issue.
- Pioneered the use of closed case reviews for building capacity across public and private sectors in financial investigation of wildlife trafficking and identifying new typologies of wildlife-related money laundering in Uganda, Zambia, Namibia and Malawi, funded by the UK government through the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund.
- Implemented support to the Wildlife Conservation Society on a five-year USAID-funded programme, 'Combatting Wildlife Crime in Uganda', including co-authoring the paper, 'Illegal Wildlife Trade in Uganda: Tracking Progress on "Following the Money"'.
- Initiated a global horizon scan to improve understanding of the impacts of climate change on the criminal drivers of large-scale, illegal, unreported and

unregulated (IUU) fishing, part of a ground-breaking new programme examining the impacts of a warming climate on transnational environmental crime and the associated risks, threats and opportunities these represent with regard to our ability to disrupt it.

- Conducted an independent assessment of the UK's progress in tackling financial crime related to the illegal wildlife trade, commissioned by the Home Office.

## **PROLIFERATION AND NUCLEAR POLICY**

Our Proliferation and Nuclear Policy (PNP) team provides detailed analysis and research on issues related to contemporary weapons of mass destruction.

In the past year, the team's influence can be seen most clearly in our hosting of the 2022 UK Project on Nuclear Issues Annual Conference. This featured contributions from some of the most important global voices on the topic, including Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, the US Under-Secretary General for Arms Control and International Security, and Samantha Job CMG, MVO, Director for Defence and International Security at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

The project has recently undergone a transformational rebrand and enhanced its collaborations with universities and organisations across the country. In particular, the UK National Nuclear Laboratory has joined the project's Board of Advisors.

We have also published papers on North Korea's chemical weapons capability and continued our research and analysis on the Iranian nuclear programme and the role it plays in the regional security perceptions of Gulf Cooperation Council states. The PNP team has also provided ongoing commentary and analysis on UK nuclear weapons policy and contributed to the understanding of the nuclear dimension of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

## **TERRORISM AND CONFLICT**

Our Terrorism and Conflict research group analyses the complex challenges of violent extremism, terrorism and conflict, offering recommendations to policymakers and practitioners in the UK, Europe and around the world.

Over the past 12 months, we have shaped the way states combat the risks posed by violent extremism:

- We have delivered training on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), designed for the EU, to more than 800 people in Africa, Asia and the Middle East – building vital expertise in this field.

- We have secured funding, in collaboration with Coventry University, to create a framework to assess the effectiveness of measures to meet the forthcoming Protect Duty – intended to shield publicly accessible locations from terrorist attacks.
- We have produced an action plan in partnership with the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) to help guide Kenyan police prevention work and encourage non-coercive strategies to CVE, in line with Kenyan national policy.

Professionals and policymakers rely on our expertise. Our Prevention Project, which analysed the effectiveness of global P/CVE interventions, has been briefed to multiple organisations in the past year, including: the Home Office; the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Counter Terrorism Policing Headquarters; the Metropolitan Police; and the US Department of Homeland Security.

We have also contributed to public understanding of terrorism and conflict, particularly relating to the collapse of the previous Afghan government and the restoration of Taliban rule.

## **RUSI INTERNATIONAL**

Our Leadership Centre is devoted to delivering executive education programmes for diplomats and senior military officials. All studies provide qualification certificates, with full academic accreditation also available.

While the highly interactive nature of these courses meant they were severely curtailed by the pandemic, we were able to restart in-person training during 2021–22, and the flagship training we provide to Qatari diplomats has now resumed.

# Our Wider Activity

The work of our research groups is supported and complemented by teams focused on our operations, including human resources and finance, as well as communications, events, fundraising, membership and publications. Dedicated to maximising RUSI's success, they have been integral to the impact we have had over the past year, especially in addressing the extraordinary interest in the Ukrainian conflict.

## OUR PEOPLE

We now have 115 employees working for our UK registered charity, up from 102 a year earlier. This growth, especially in the proportion of our employees dedicated to research, reflects increasing demand for our expertise and leaves us even better placed to fulfil research briefs in the coming years.

We have developed a new Diversity, Equality and Inclusivity Strategy. An employee-owned strategy, developed with direct input from our employees, it aims to improve our consideration of diversity, equality and inclusivity across the Institute. This is intended to help us attract exceptional talent, to help all our employees realise their potential and enhance the impact, effectiveness and relevance of our work.

## THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

From mid-February 2022, as it became clear that Russia was intending to invade Ukraine, there was a step change in the demand for our expertise and insights. This required considerable effort from our operational employees as well as our researchers to meet this need, and their dedication and collaboration helped deliver exceptional results.

We have sought to meet the unprecedented interest through our flagship web commentaries. From the end of February, our 34 commentaries on the conflict (plus three *RUSI Defence Systems* articles and a *Newsbrief*) received more than 1.3 million views. Our best-performing article was viewed more than 500,000 times. We are continuing to average more than 30,000 readers each week and are now typically publishing seven commentaries a week, more than double the three a week at the start of 2021.

Our Twitter following also grew rapidly – and without paid promotion – from around 85,000 in February to over 100,000 by the end of March, generating more than 2.4 million impressions of our posts in March.



Our experts featured in more than 50,000 media reports in 2021–22, an almost 200% increase on the year before. Around 35,000 of these mentions related to the Ukrainian conflict and a further 5,000 to the fall of the Afghan government in August 2021.

A number of the events we hosted exploring developments in the Ukraine conflict attracted more than 1,000 virtual attendees – doubling previous high-water marks for attendance.

## OUR GLOBAL REACH

We are expanding our global reach. Our events are attracting global interest. Last year, delegates from 174 different countries attended events organised by RUSI.

Our presence in the media is increasingly international, too. US-based media are the single largest source of coverage of RUSI and our researchers, with around 37% of our mentions originating from the US. This does, however, include many of the major sources of news syndication. Approximately 10% of our mentions are from UK titles, with the balance from other countries around the world.

Our redeveloped website is also setting new records for visits and, increasingly, these visits are coming from outside the UK. In 2021–22, 72.1% of our users were from outside the UK, compared to 62.9% a year earlier. Additionally, the last year is the first time that the UK has not been the country from which the most visitors originated: 27.5% of our users are US-based, versus 27.1% in the UK.

## INNOVATIONS IN PUBLISHING

Our redeveloped website is one example of the innovations we are deploying to deepen engagement with our audiences.

Our electronic publications have adopted a new data visualisation tool allowing readers to select and visualise the data that interests them. In addition, a new ‘scrollytelling’ tool has been used to complement selected publications. This tool allows a close integration between the written word and graphics and has been especially valuable in communicating rich stories to our diverse audiences.

We have partnered with Project Syndicate to offer a selection of its content to RUSI members as part of our *Newsbrief* – an offering exclusive to members. This partnership will directly benefit our members who are now gaining expert insights on an even broader range of topics and regions.



## **GROWING MEMBERSHIP**

The services we offer our members and the networks they are part of are a major way we fulfil our purpose to encourage debate on the critical issues in national and international defence and security and international affairs.

Almost 2,000 individuals are now members of RUSI, and 2021–22 generated an 11% increase in individual membership. We also saw a 23% increase in the number of organisation members, from 158 to 195. This increase is an important source of revenue for our operations and remains a key focus for us.

## **SECURING OUR FUTURE**

Our long-term future is tied to the successful redevelopment of our home at 61 Whitehall. In 2021–22 we reached the initial Phase One goal of securing £10 million. Three generous donations from The Bacon Foundation, The Drake Foundation and Max Kelly were received over the year.

Crucially, over 70% of the pledged Phase One donations have already been received, giving our Trustees the confidence to proceed with the redevelopment project. During 2022–23 we will begin the implementation of Phase Two to raise a further £3.5 million.

While the focus of the fundraising has been the capital appeal for RUSI's building, additional funds have also been secured to support research initiatives.

Since its launch, our fundraising appeal has been led by Sir Mick Davis. With the successful completion of Phase One, Sir Mick has decided to step down. This report puts on record our thanks to Sir Mick and also to RUSI's Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as Charles Hansard, Paddy Nicoll and Paddy Walker, for their hard work and commitment to our success.