

**ROYAL COLLEGE OF DEFENCE STUDIES  
COURSE IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND STRATEGY  
2014 SYLLABUS**

**Introduction**

1. The RCDS course is a post-graduate-level course in international strategic studies, focusing on, political, diplomatic, security social and economic related issues at the grand strategic level – the level at which governments take decisions on these issues both nationally and within the international community. To prepare its Members, selected from over forty countries for their potential for future senior responsibility, the course majors on developing the ability to think and work at the strategic level. Issues are analysed for their implications in terms of strategy and leadership. The focus of study on the main course is practical rather than theoretical.<sup>1</sup>

**RCDS Mission**

2. The RCDS mission is:

*To prepare selected senior military officers and government officials as well as appropriate individuals from the private sector, from the United Kingdom and elsewhere for senior leadership and management roles. We do this by developing strategic understanding and the capacity for strategic thinking through rigorous analysis of:*

- *the international security agenda;*
- *the levers that provide for security, stability and prosperity*
- *the key tenets of leadership at the national strategic level.*

**RCDS Product**

3. The aim of the RCDS course is to provide graduates who:

*Understand the international strategic context, are skilled in analysis and able to work intuitively across national, cultural and ideological boundaries to lead or contribute to developing strategy at the highest level.*

**RCDS Objectives**

4. On completion of the course the RCDS graduate will be able to:

- a. Describe and evaluate the 21st century strategic context.
- b. Identify the instruments of power, explain their limitations and apply them to the analysis of a strategic issue.
- c. Explain and apply the tenets of strategy.
- d. Analyse strategic issues and formulate strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Members seeking an additional framework of international relations theory can opt for the complementary MA programme run by RCDS' academic partner King's College, London, in parallel with the main programme. This paper excludes the additional MA syllabus.

- e. Recognise and contrast the effect and impact of different national/cultural perspectives on international issues and strategy.
- f. Recognise and assess the demands of leadership at the highest level.
- g. Personally, develop an international network of trusted interlocutors.

### Course Structure

5. The course themes are developed and taught within a 3 term structure:

- a. Term 1 (Weeks 1-8) – Current and Future Strategic Context.
- b. Term 2 (Weeks 9-19) – Contemporary Conflict and Strategy.
- c. Term 3 (Weeks 20-42) – Regional Understanding & Strategic Issues.<sup>2</sup>

The course occupies 44 weeks in total. Induction takes place in the week preceding the start of Term 1. The final 2 weeks include the MA examination, individual member appraisals and debriefs, keynote concluding lectures, prize giving and departure administration.

6. Throughout the course, the two “golden threads” are: **Strategy** and **Leadership**. The **master questions** for the Members, applicable at every stage of the course, are “What does this mean for the strategy of x?” and “What leadership is required of y?” Strategic leadership is therefore addressed through lectures programmed in all 3 terms. The 3 terms are unequal in length and are supplemented by study visits within the UK and abroad.<sup>3</sup>

7. The key skill of analysing and formulating strategy is developed incrementally on the course. Progression and understanding is monitored and assessed through the completion of 4 written exercises:

- a. **Term 1.** Following exposure to the current and future strategic context, Members complete a reflective 1000 word essay in which they set out their individual strategic insights (SA 1). **This paper is delivered in Week 9.**
- b. **Term 2 - .** At the start of the term Members select individually an historical conflict and deliver a 3000 word strategic level analysis paper in a prescribed format (SA 2). **This paper is delivered in Week 20.**
- c. **Term 3:**

### EITHER

- i. An academic dissertation of 5-10000 words, **which is delivered in Week 32.** The process of selecting the strategic topic for analysis, in concert with the SDS, begins during Term 1.

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<sup>2</sup> UK, Europe and Turkey, Middle East and North Africa, Russia/Eurasia, South Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, Asia/Pacific and Latin America.

<sup>3</sup> Study visits: UN HQ, New York and Washington, EU and NATO HQ, the City of London, selected UK industries, selected UK regions, selected global regions from those at footnote 1. In addition, an annual study exchange takes place with the French Centre des Haute Etudes Militaire (CHEM).

**OR**

- ii. At the start of Term 3 Members select individually an issue of their choice for a 3000 word strategic level analysis paper (SA3). Members are also free to choose the format of the paper. **This paper is delivered in Week 32.**

**AND**

- iii. By the start of Term 3 Members are allocated to an Overseas Study Tour (OST) Group (approximately 15 per group); in sub groups of 3 or 4 they then select a contemporary strategic issue relevant to their OST region to analyse in order to formulate an appropriate strategy (SA 4). This work is presented in a prescribed format identical to SA 2. This paper **is delivered in Week 41.**
8. In addition, Members take part in 2 practical role play exercises (STRATEX):
- a. **STRATEX 1.** In **Week 18** Members are allocated to country specific groups for a 3 day exercise. The groups carry analyses of specified issues with national and international ramifications leading the formulation of an appropriate national strategy.
  - b. **STRATEX 2.** In **Week 42**, Members are reallocated to country specific groups for a 5 day exercise. In similar format to STRATEX 1, this involves group analysis of specified issues with national and international ramifications leading the formulation of an appropriate national strategy. In addition, there is a media element to this exercise.
9. Annexes A - C set out the RCDS syllabus term by term, together with the outcomes expected in terms of the Members' learning and development. The terms are not mutually exclusive and there is some overlap, most notably between terms 2 and 3, not least because the most salient contemporary issues are bound to surface in any relevant discussion, whether in plenary discussion periods or seminars. There is also deliberate reinforcement of learning by returning to strategic issues and by the use of case studies or cross-cutting themes not only in term 2 but also in term 3, which is otherwise organised on a regional basis. Annex D sets out the aims and objectives of the strategic leadership thread which spans all 3 terms.

S ABBOTT  
Course Director

## **TERM 1 - THE CURRENT AND FUTURE STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

1. **Aim.** The aim of Term 1 is to examine the principal influences upon, and potential sources of, instability and conflict in the world, in terms of the strategic trends in geo-politics, geo-economics, society and culture, science and technology, and geo-physical trends including our interaction with the physical environment.
2. **Term Objectives.** On completion of Term 1 a Member will be able to:
  - a. Describe the world economic scene and review the impact of the global financial crisis.
  - b. Review the changing distribution of global power and understand its potential impact.
  - c. Describe the inter-connectedness of the world economy and assess the impact of globalisation.
  - d. Describe and explain global demographic trends and review the implications of falling/rising, ageing/youth bulge populations.
  - e. Identify the indicators of climate change and review evidence of its potential impact.
  - f. Describe and assess the factors affecting energy, food and water security and analyse their potential impact.
  - g. Describe and assess the extent to which ethnicity, culture and religion drive politics and influence social cohesion and stability.
  - h. Describe and assess how the application of technology may shape the future and impact on government and society.
  - i. Describe and differentiate between the operation of the UN and other major international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank.
  - j. Identify the key tenets of International law and the global commons
3. **Content.** The following subjects are covered in Term 1:
  - a. **Introduction:**
    - i. International Relations theory.
    - ii. The international system and the nation-state.
    - iii. The concept of power.
    - iv. Geo-political trends – the rise of China and Asia generally.
    - v. Political ideology and ethics.
    - vi. The hegemonic role of the USA.

- b. **Economics and Finance:**
  - i. The global economy.
  - ii. The enduring post-2008 financial crisis and sovereign debt.
  - iii. International Financial Institutions (IMF, WB).
  - iv. International trade and investment.
  
- c. **Social change:**
  - i. Globalisation.
  - ii. Demographics.
  - iii. Migration and Urbanisation.
  - iv. Disease and its impact on social stability and security.
  - v. Poverty.
  - vi. Transnational and organised crime.
  - vii. Corruption and Patronage.
  
- d. **The Influence of Culture:**
  - i. The politics of ethnicity.
  - ii. The politics of religion.
  - iii. Fundamentalism.
  - iv. Cultural differences in ways of thinking, perspectives and values.
  
- e. **Science and Technology:**
  - i. Tomorrow's world (key emerging technologies).
  - ii. Government's role in sponsoring strategic research.
  - iii. Trends in defence and security applications for emerging technologies.
  
- f. **The physical world and the pressure on resources:**
  - i. Climate change.
  - ii. Energy security.
  - iii. Water security.
  - iv. Food security.

- g. **International organisations, international law and the global commons:**
- i. The United Nations.
  - ii. International law.
  - iii. The growth of international governance
  - iv. Human rights.
  - v. The High Seas.
  - vi. The internet and the problems of cyberspace.
  - vii. Outer Space.
  - viii. The polar regions

## **TERM 2 – CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT AND STRATEGY**

1. **Aim.** The Aim of Term 2 is to examine the challenges presented by conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reviewing the ends, ways and means open to governments, agencies and international organisations for strategy to counter threats to security and to prevent, manage or resolve conflict by managing crises and conducting and concluding campaigns should military action be chosen in the last resort.
2. **Objectives.** On completion of Term 2 Members will be able to:
  - a. Describe the shifting paradigm of conflict up to the present day and analyse how its character may evolve, in particular typologies of terrorism and insurgency and assess their implications for counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategy.
  - b. Recognise and describe the diplomatic, political, military, economic and other instruments of power to prevent and resolve conflict, and assess and analyse their utility, interdependence and any constraints on their application.
  - c. Describe and assess the role and influence of diverse media and other forms of information available to protagonists in shaping the strategic environment.
  - d. Define the legal constraints and obligations on all protagonists and understand how they impact on policy and strategy.
  - e. Describe, analyse and appraise the formulation of practical strategy taking account of the key actors, the complexity of the real world and the risks of unintended consequences.
3. **Content:** The following subjects are covered in Term 2:
  - a. **Strategic Theory and Concepts:**
    - i. Introduction to strategic theory.
    - ii. Deterrence.
    - iii. The policy/strategy interface.
    - iv. The problems of grand strategy: international order; national interests; transnational threats; alliances, coalitions and other forms of international co-operation.
  - b. **Instruments of Power** (which may include):
    - i. Diplomatic.
    - ii. Military.
    - iii. Law.

- iv. Information/media.
  - v. Aid.
  - vi. International alliances – NATO and other regional security organisations.
- c. **Key threats to security and the implications for counter- strategy** (which may include):
- i. Nature of Future Conflict.
  - ii. Insurgency.
  - iii. Terrorism.
  - iv. Cyber attack.
  - v. Nuclear weapon proliferation.
  - vi. Water
- d. **Case Studies.** Individual case studies are selected on a year by year basis and confirmed during the course (which may include):
- i. Afghanistan.
  - ii. Iraq.
  - iii. Congo.
  - iv. Nepal.
  - v. Strategic Business view.
- e. **Strategy Formulation:**
- i. Tools for strategic analysis.
  - ii. Evidence Based Decision Making.
  - iii. The integrated approach.
  - iv. Strategic narrative.
  - v. Strategy exercise.

### TERM 3 – REGIONAL UNDERSTANDING & STRATEGIC ISSUES

1. **Aim:** Term 3 is designed to examine the impact of contemporary national and international issues on the current and future **security, stability** and **prosperity** of key states and regions in the world at the grand strategic level.

2. **Objectives.** On completion of Term 3 Members will be able to:

- a. Define the characteristics of the different regions of the world, including differences in approach to national and international issues.
- b. Describe and understand the political, economic and security challenges facing states within each region; and in particular assess the key security issues that shape national strategies and relationships in each region.
- c. Assess the prospects for stability, security and prosperity, including the scope for co-operation between states.
- d. Identify cross cutting strategic issues of global relevance, relating these to the work in Term 2.

3. **Content.** The following regions (not every country listed will be covered; selection depends upon OST choices, world events and the case studies selected for term 2) are covered in Term 3:

a. **The United Kingdom:**

- i. Constitutional arrangements, devolution and modernisation.
- ii. Changing Britain.
- iii. The UK place in the world.

b. **Europe:**

- i. The meaning of Europe.
- ii. The European Union.
- iii. Germany.
- iv. France.
- v. East Central Europe.
- vi. The Nordic Region.
- vii. The Balkans.
- viii. Turkey

Cross Cutting Themes

- Regional Security Systems.
- Supra-national governance/integration.
- Sovereign debt.
- Migration.

c. **Eurasia:**

- i. Russia.
- ii. Ukraine.
- iii. The Caucasus.
- iv. Central Asia.

<p>Cross Cutting Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Energy security.</li><li>• Economic instruments of power.</li><li>• Frozen conflicts.</li><li>• Migration.</li></ul>
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d. **South Asia:**

- i. India.
- ii. Pakistan.
- iii. Nepal.
- iv. Burma.

<p>Cross Cutting Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nuclear Deterrence.</li><li>• Conflict resolution (Sri Lanka, Nepal).</li><li>• Water security.</li></ul>
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e. **The Middle East and North Africa.**

- i. Israel and the Palestinian Territories.
- ii. Syria.
- iii. Egypt.
- iv. The Arabian Peninsula.
- v. Iraq.
- vi. Iran.
- vii. North Africa and the Mediterranean

<p>Cross Cutting Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People power revolutions.</li><li>• The Middle East Peace Process.</li><li>• The role of Religious identity (Sects).</li><li>• Nuclear proliferation.</li></ul>
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f. **Sub-Saharan Africa:**

- i. Nigeria and West Africa.
- ii. South Africa and Southern Africa.
- iii. Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.
- iv. The Great Lakes region.
- v. Sudan.

<p>Cross Cutting Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Causes of conflict/state failure.</li><li>• Governance and development strategies (factors for success).</li><li>• Regional integration.</li><li>• The UN and Post conflict stabilisation.</li></ul>
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g. **Asia-Pacific:**

- i. China.
- ii. Japan.
- iii. The Korean Peninsula.

<p>Cross Cutting Themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transitions in the balance of power.</li><li>• Chinese trade/investment and diaspora.</li><li>• Sovereign Debt.</li><li>• Migration.</li></ul>
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- iv. SE Asia.
- v. Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific.

**h. Latin Americas:**

- i. Brazil.
- ii. Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay.
- iii. North Andean region
- iv. Venezuela.
- v. Cuba.
- vi. Mexico and Central America.

**Cross Cutting Themes**

- Drug trafficking and organised crime.
- Migration.
- Fragile states.
- International treaties.

## LEADERSHIP IN THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

1. **Aim** The aim of the leadership thread is to inculcate an understanding of the theory and practice of strategic leadership and expose the challenges faced by leaders at the strategic level.
2. **Objectives:** On completion of the course Members will be able to:
  - a. Recognise the difference between leadership and command and differentiate between the differing behaviours and requirements needed for both.
  - b. Describe the characteristics of the strategic environment and identify the requisite characteristics of leadership at the strategic level.
  - c. Understand the psychology of leadership, and recognise the positive and negative traits displayed by strategic leaders.
  - d. Recognise and analyse how leaders emerge or are selected at the strategic level
3. **Content:** The following subjects are covered throughout the year in the series of leadership lectures:
  - a. **The Psychology of leadership:**
    - i. Relevant neuro-science.
    - ii. Current leadership theory.
    - iii. Personality traits that help or hinder leadership.
    - iv. Gender.
  - b. **The role of leaders at the strategic level:**
    - i. Public sector exemplars.
    - ii. Private sector exemplars.
    - iii. Goal-setting, decision-making, crisis-management.
    - iv. Change management.

**c. The characteristics of successful strategic leadership:**

- i. Relationships.
- ii. Ethics.
- iii. The strategic team.
- iv. Self-awareness.