



## ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg  
P.O. Box 69726  
BRYANSTON 2021

[info@rafoc.org](mailto:info@rafoc.org) [www.rafoc.org](http://www.rafoc.org)

President:	David MacKinnon-Little	
Vice Presidents:	Basil Hersov, Geoff Quick	
Chairman:	Bruce Harrison	<a href="mailto:bruce@jbharrison.co.za">bruce@jbharrison.co.za</a> Cell: 083 325 0025
Vice Chairman:	Jon Adams	<a href="mailto:bookings@rafoc.org">bookings@rafoc.org</a> Cell: 082 450 0616
Hon. Secretary:	Colin Ackroyd	Cell: 082 800 5845
Hon. Treasurer:	Jeff Earle	Cell: 083 652 1002
Committee Member:	Geoff Fish	Cell: 083 660 9697
	Russell Swanborough	
Web Master:	Hanke Fourie	Cell: 082 553 0210
Almoner:	Rob Tannahill	Cell: 082 806 6779
Bank Account:	Nedbank - Melrose Arch	Br: 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063

## RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 288 23<sup>rd</sup> JANUARY 2026

### GREETINGS:

Fires and floods around SA... Another national disaster for South Africa... Joburg residents in the dark as streetlight repair times skyrocket... City Power reveals 27,948 power cuts in three months... Gauteng residents warned about water usage... horror crash kills 15 learners in Vanderbijlpark... Test Flying Academy of South Africa breaches sanctions and drops SA in brown stuff... Furore continues over apparent SANDF defiance of Ramaphosa in Iranian exercise participation... McBride's "IPID" testimony sparks tension in parliament... Eskom coming after South Africans with solar panels on their roofs (without authority to do so)...

Davos talk-shop under way again... Trump "shatters world order" claims "world not secure" until US owns Greenland... but may have backed down from his crusade if a suitable treaty can be negotiated... Starmer makes every crisis sound like a breach of protocol at a village fete - but is ready to impose a social media ban on under-16s... The 'capitulation' of West Midlands Police to Islamists... Iran protest death toll soars - 2700 and counting... Two short but spectacular HS2 tunnels offer glimmer of hope for stalling project... Dakar Rally great Nasser Al-Attiyah drives to victory in 2026 Edition... Musk cannot buy Ryanair because he is not an EU citizen, says O'Leary... Prince Harry fights back tears, tells the High Court that tabloid journalists made his wife's life "an absolute misery".

### NEW YEAR GREETINGS:

A letter written by Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) master of dry humour, at the turn of the last century, to a local paper read: "New Year's Day - Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual. Yesterday, everybody smoked his last cigar, took his last drink, and swore his last oath. Today, we are a pious and exemplary community. Thirty days from now, we shall have cast our reformation to the winds and gone to cutting our ancient shortcomings considerably shorter than ever. We shall also reflect pleasantly upon how we did the same old thing last year about this time. However, go in, community. New Year's is a harmless annual institution, of no particular use to anybody save as a scapegoat for promiscuous drunks, and friendly calls, and humbug resolutions, and we wish you to enjoy it with a looseness suited to the greatness of the occasion."

## FURORE CONTINUES OVER IRANIAN EXERCISE PARTICIPATION:

Defence analyst Dean Wingrin said Iran purposefully and publicly went to sea with the rest of the 'Will for Peace' exercise fleet, to an exercise area in False Bay that is out of eyesight. It thus makes no difference whether they participated or observed, the mere fact they were seen to join the exercise fleet gives the impression of defiance of the SA President's instruction."

"Whether a direct instruction or not, Iran ought to have known of the president's intent (reported that they were informed) and, as a guest in South African waters, abide by South Africa's wishes."

Photos from the day of arrival in Simon's Town were telegraphed around the world, Wingrin noted.

"That's what Iran wanted: Wave the flag to the world at a time they are killing thousands of their citizens at home. Their exercise objective achieved before the maritime exercise even commenced. Now South Africa is left to deal with the aftermath.

"It's not about kowtowing to the US. You totally miss the point if you think that. It's about balancing trade and commerce with your largest trading partners (who employ thousands in SA) with a political supporter with negligible trade. Got to be pragmatic for all South Africans," he concluded.



African Defence Review Director Darren Olivier said Magwenya's statements confirm that Ramaphosa's instruction, delayed by Chinese obstruction, was that Iran shouldn't actively participate. This instruction was ignored by the SANDF, Iran, UAE, Russia, and China.

"It's impossible to overstate what a big deal this is. According to all the evidence shared publicly and reported so far, senior leaders in the SANDF conspired with Iran, Russia, the UAE, and China to disobey an order from Ramaphosa and nobody in any position did anything about it."

"The public, media, and Parliament should be up in arms over this and demanding more answers. And everyone involved must be removed from their posts, with real consequences that will both re-assert civilian control over the military and prevent anything like this happening again."

"Unfortunately, the Presidency is going along with the Board of Inquiry launched by Defence Minister Motshekga, meaning that she escapes accountability at least for the time being. Given that it was her responsibility to ensure that the instruction was carried out, it's a mistake."

"Finally, given how disrespectfully China, Russia, the UAE and Iran have treated South Africa in its own waters, this should be the end of SA's participation in this and other exercises with any of those four countries until they're willing to agree to and accept new boundaries." (*DefenceWeb*)

## KNP AREA FLOODS:

Heavy rainfall in Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces has led to severe flooding of historic proportions in Kruger National Park, forcing the closure of several camps, gates, and roads. Over 300 mm of rainfall has been recorded in Hoedspruit, with some areas expecting an additional 100-200mm of rain over the next 48 hours. The rains have been attributed to a strong tropical low-pressure system moving over the northeastern parts of SA.



#### Affected Areas:-

Satara Rest Camp, Letaba Rest Camp, Shingwedzi, Sirheni, and Bateleur Camps, Pafuri and Punda Maria gates closed due to flooding, and Crocodile Bridge Gate, closed due to rising river levels. These gates and areas are progressively re-opening as the floods subside.

In other Areas, Kampala II Boat Safari Lodge suffered extensive damage when the Olifants River broke its banks and flooded. Many rural villages have also been cut off with roads washed away or inaccessible. The Komati River flooded and there is apparently no access to Phalaborwa. Sadly, there are currently reports of at least 19 people losing their lives in Limpopo and Mpumalanga Province. *(Various sites)*

#### RAF TYPHOON DISPLAY TEAM:

Members of the public have been treated to some thrilling performances from the RAF's Typhoon Display Team – and this year the fast jet will be flown by Flight Lieutenant Tom Nation, who takes over from Squadron Leader Nathan Shawyer. He joined the RAF in 2015 where he completed his Initial Officer Training at RAF Cranwell. He then went on to Elementary Flying Training with 16 Sqn at RAF Wittering, returning to the Grob Tutor.

Flt Lt Nation was streamed fast jet, continuing to his Basic Fast Jet Training course on the Tucano T1 at RAF Linton-on-Ouse.



He then went on to complete Advanced Flying Training and the Tactics and Weapons course at RAF Valley on the Hawk T2 with 25 Squadron and 4 Squadron, respectively. He arrived on 29 Squadron to complete his operational conversion onto the Typhoon in early 2021.

Having been chosen to serve with 6 Squadron – "Flying Can Openers" – based at RAF Lossiemouth, he flew on ops in the Middle East, Nato Air Policing in Eastern Europe and deployed to the Falkland Islands, Australia and Germany.

*The 2026 Typhoon Display Team pilot is 29 Squadron Flight Lieutenant Tom Nation (Picture: MOD)*



## **UK AND POLAND DEEPEN DEFENCE COOPERATION:**

The UK and Poland have agreed to deeper coordination on missile defences and helicopter training as both countries look to bolster their defence on the eastern Flank and confront the threats posed by Russia.

The agreement was reached during talks at Downing Street between Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and Polish president Karol Nawrocki, where the leaders committed to enhanced joint training.

It will see the two countries explore the development and procurement of new capabilities to counter a range of air threats, support the creation of additional manufacturing capacity in Europe, and train Polish helicopter pilots in the UK through a Nato-led programme.

Defence Secretary John Healey said: "The UK and Poland's defence relationship has never been stronger. Standing strong on NATO's eastern flank, Poland is a crucial ally for the UK in this era of rising threats."

He added that it shows how the UK and Poland are "stepping up" to defend Europe, and "face down the threat from Putin."

## **ISRAELI AIR FORCE:**

In a quiet build-up of capability, three more F-35I "Adir" fighter aircraft, manufactured by Lockheed Martin, landed last Sunday at Nevatim Air Force Base. The aircraft will be assigned to the 116th Squadron and the 140th Squadron.

Since the outbreak of the war, the "Adir" fleet has been operating continuously across a wide range of defensive and offensive missions in all arenas of combat. The integration of the new aircraft marks a further enhancement of the "Adir" as a combat force multiplier, contributing to the Israeli Air Force's operational capabilities. Israel deeply appreciates the United States continued and steadfast support for Israel's security. (IAF)

## USAF: WORLD'S LARGEST:

The United States Air Force remains the world's largest air force by far, but did you know that, when counting is restricted to just crewed aircraft, the USAF has been shrinking for decades and is set to continue shrinking for the foreseeable future? The US military aviation boasts a much larger lead when the aircraft of the US Navy, Marines, and Army are added. However, a major factor influencing the numbers is whether trainers and uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) are included.

The US is looking to stem its numerical decline by introducing "Collaborative Combat Aircraft" and other UAVs of various descriptions into its fleet starting in the late 2020s.



The US Air Force is easily the world's biggest air force by any measure, except for helicopters, as that is the US Army's domain. Excluding trainers and uncrewed aircraft, the US Air Force has around 3,600 aircraft of all types in inventory. If trainers and large UAVs are included, then the fleet numbers rise to around 5,000 aircraft. The number is expected to soon dip below 5,000 for the first time since the Second World War. Not only does the US Air Force have more aircraft, but it also has more capable aircraft than other air forces, as the US boasts far more special mission aircraft and around 75% of the world's tanker aircraft. While a lot of emphasis is often put on fighter jets, it is almost impossible to overstate how important these special mission and tanker aircraft are to the fighter jets' ability to project power. No other air force (apart from the US Navy/Marines to some extent) has the ability to project power almost anywhere in the world as the US Air Force can. At the end of WWII, the US Army Air Forces had around 72,000 aircraft in service, while the US Navy and Marines added another 40,000 for a total of around 112,000. Today, in raw numbers, it's around 10% of that. *(SimpleFlying)*

## UKRAINE'S DRONE HUNTING UAVs:



Drone warfare has now become an integral component of Ukraine's offensive and defensive strategy. Strategically, Ukraine has continued to target critical Russian infrastructure, particularly defence-industrial facilities, including drone production sites, aiming to cripple its UAV ecosystem. Operation Spiderweb marked a milestone in Ukraine's campaign, as it hit five Russian air bases in a synchronised attack, reportedly causing significant damage to 41 Russian aircraft, including important surveillance aircraft and strategic bombers.

Ukraine has inducted drones as part of its defensive strategy to construct a 'drone wall', producing a 15 km "kill-zone" along key sections of the frontline, enhancing battlefield visibility. These systems have evolved to offer persistent surveillance and precision strikes, in some areas serving as a partial replacement for the infantry. Ukraine's progress in drone warfare has been remarkable, shaped by battlefield necessities and operational realities. Drones have reshaped war and how it is fought; however, they have not yet replaced traditional military capabilities such as artillery and air power. Drones can deliver decisive effects at the tactical and operational levels even without securing overall victory. (*Observer Research Foundation*) Also reported: Ukraine is currently testing several types of domestically developed microwave weapons. Brave1 CEO Andrii Hrytseniuk shared this on the *Militarnyi's* "To Arms!" broadcast. These weapons use powerful electromagnetic radiation in the microwave range to disable equipment, including drones. (*Militarnyi*) Ukraine has also been paying drone makers \$20,000 for each Russian Shahed they destroy. (*Business Insider*)

## A SPY ON YOUR STREET?

Is there an undercover agent living on your street? Think of a spy and most of us would picture James Bond, but today's agent can look a lot more like your neighbour.

Across Europe, authorities say they've uncovered covert networks including delivery drivers, press photographers and beauticians.

These people are being paid to gather intelligence, harass targets or sabotage infrastructure.

For Moscow, it's a low-cost way to apply pressure: it's deniable, disposable and designed to sit below the threshold of open conflict.

For the public, it raises a more unsettling question: what does a modern attack look like when it's built around disruption rather than destruction?

One of the defining features of this new landscape is how ordinary the recruitment can be.

Former British soldier Zak West, now with Riley Risk, explains: "The Kremlin recruiters will find these people. It's not hard, you know, and anyone can go onto Facebook. Anyone can go into Telegram groups and find vulnerable people."

That vulnerability can mean financial pressure, low-level criminality, ideology, a grievance – or simple thrill-seeking. What matters is that the entry point is often digital, fast and hard to predict.

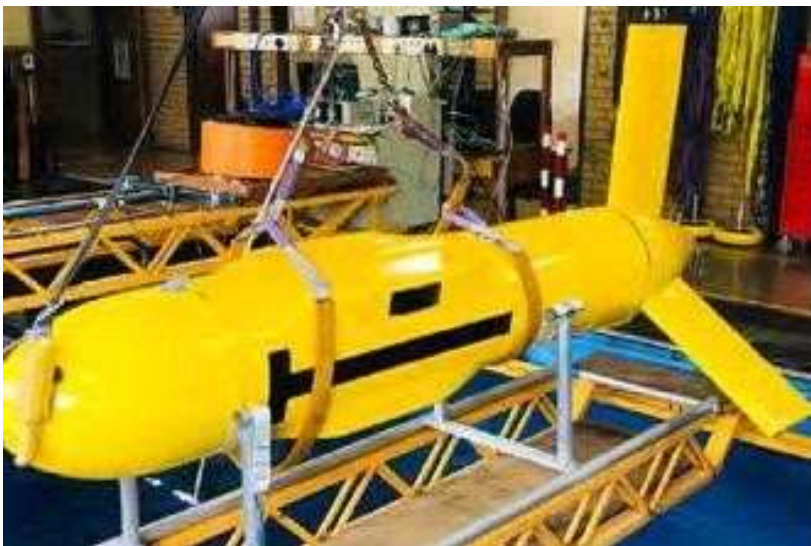
Elisabeth Braw, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, puts the wider shift in blunt terms, saying: "The kind of safety and security we were used to – that doesn't exist anymore.

"It doesn't mean that we should always panic, but it means that we should be aware of the threats."

Andrei Soldatov, a Russian investigative journalist, goes further, adding: "In terms of making things really dangerous for citizens of Europe, I would say it's extremely dangerous. And we need to take this very seriously."

## **CSIR SUCCESSFULLY DEMONSTRATES UNDERWATER COMMUNICATION SYSTEM:**

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has successfully demonstrated a broadband underwater data communication system to Armscor, which aims to develop fast and reliable acoustic underwater data transfer for naval operations. The CSIR achieved near-perfect transmission and data rates exceeding 240 kbps during a demonstration of the latest version of the system at the CSIR's underwater acoustic testing facility, the organisation said in its latest 2024/25 annual report. "This technology aims to transmit data, such as sonar images, over distances of up to 500 metres, enhancing the capabilities of the South African Navy during naval operations. Researchers implemented multiple-input multiple-output technology, utilising multiple transmitter and receiver transducers to improve the broadband underwater data communication system.



*The synthetic aperture sonar technology demonstrator implemented on the towfish submersible towing vessel. Photo: CSIR*

This technology provides greater transmission bandwidth, allowing for enhanced signal reliability and increased data rates. In addition to software development, new mechanical and electronic hardware was developed for two buoy-mounted, stand-alone transmitter and receiver systems," the CSIR stated. Rapid wireless underwater data transfer is becoming ever more crucial, it noted,

particularly for autonomous underwater vehicles – modern devices capable of mapping the ocean floor, inspecting underwater structures and ensuring the safety of waterways. Researchers also explored live video streaming techniques for the system during the demonstration. *(Via Jim Findlay)*

## CHEERS FOR NOW:

Our first lunch of the year last Friday saw a fairly small attendance, as is usual for this time of the year as members return from holidays or get to grips with work issues. A cheerful and convivial company sat down to enjoy one another's company and a meal of toothsome Coq au Vin with seasonal veggies followed by a delectable Creme Brulee.

Lunch was followed by the now traditional aviation quiz compiled by Karl Jensen. Deceptively simple pictures and questions stretched our minds and memories, and more than that gave us some great participative entertainment. Dankie Kaptein! The raffle followed, to round off an enjoyable afternoon, and Mike Haupt happily carried off the Whisky

## TAILPIECE:

The United States Department of Justice (DOJ) has filed a forfeiture complaint against two Mission Crew Trainers (MCTs) that were intercepted while being transported from the Test Flying Academy of South Africa to the People's Republic of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA)... HKGK... *(Developing story)*

Donald Trump was on his way to Davos but Air Force One had to turn around over the Atlantic owing to an electrical issue. He will, eventually, land in Switzerland, where European leaders are braced for a president on the warpath after fresh swipes at Sir Keir Starmer and Emmanuel Macron. *(Telegraph)*





### **RYANAIR CEO TO ADDRESS/UNDRESS ELON MUSK TWITTER TANTRUM AT DUBLIN PRESS CONFERENCE**

Ryanair CEO, Michael O'Leary, has called a press conference at 10:00 tomorrow (Wed, 21 Jan) in Dublin to address (undress??) Elon Musk's latest Twitshit.

"Musk knows even less about airline ownership rules than he does about aircraft aerodynamics", said MOL.

Perhaps Musk needs a break?? Ryanair is launching a Great Idiots seat sale especially for Elon and any other idiots on 'X'. 100,000 seats for just €16.99 one-way.

Buy now before Musk gets one!!!

Musk cannot buy Ryanair because he is not an EU citizen, says O'Leary...

## FOUR YEARS ON...

*From a conflict expected to be over in days, four years of battle followed Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The first thing to note is that the war is not over yet.*

By early January 2026, Russia's war in Ukraine will have gone on longer than the Soviets' Great Patriotic War, waged from the onset of Operation Barbarossa on Sunday 22 June 1941 until the Nazi capitulation on Saturday 9 May 1945.

The comparison is not merely chronological; it is rather civilisational. The earlier war forged the Soviet myth of historical destiny through sacrifice, suffering and an almost theological narrative of redemption through endurance. The present war, by contrast, stretches into the future stripped of legitimacy and strategic coherence, prolonged not by necessity but by delusion, not by conviction but by the refusal of power to confront the catastrophic consequences of its own aggression. Empires, history reminds us, rarely collapse because they are defeated on the battlefield. They unravel when the stories that once sustained their authority finally dissolve under the weight of their own misjudgement.

The bleakness of the frontline today in Ukraine stands in stark difference with the cheer of Christmas elsewhere. The choices before Kyiv contrast with those before Western capitals about spending on social services. Russian strategy appears to have moved from achieving dramatic breakthroughs to the slow asphyxiation of the Ukrainian Defence Forces through attrition rather than manoeuvre. Unspectacular but effective, particularly if drones prevent any concentration of force. This is unimaginably tough for those involved, sparsely dotted along miles of frozen trenches. Field Marshal Slim spoke of the predominating factor in modern warfare being loneliness. How much more so today.

And the contrast with the concerns and language of politicians could not be starker. On 19 December, 2025, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared that Ukraine was 'not our war.' He added that Washington cannot 'force' a peace deal on Ukraine, though he indicated that America's negotiators are still trying to figure out what Russia wants despite US intelligence agencies warning that 'Putin has not abandoned his aims of capturing all of Ukraine and reclaiming parts of Europe that belonged to the former Soviet empire.' For nearly eight decades, the central assumption of Western statecraft had been that European stability was indivisible from American security, that aggression left unanswered metastasises into systemic disorder and that the defence of free societies abroad was inseparable from the preservation of legitimacy at home. To speak otherwise is not realism; it is the abdication of a strategic inheritance patiently constructed after 1945. If this US administration and Russia under Vladimir Putin share one thing, it seems to be their willingness to tear Europe apart.

The echoes of the past are both striking and eery. 'We have sustained a defeat without a war,' said Winston Churchill in emphasising that the Munich process of 1938 had merely delayed the inevitable conflict with Hitler's Germany, 'the consequences of which will travel far with us along our road. This is only the beginning of the reckoning.'

There is a tendency, exacerbated by the media age, to rather think about wars as short-run events, a trait founded in an ahistorical understanding of what war – rather than movies or battles – is about. The war in Ukraine has been a catastrophic failure for Putin in almost every measure, in spite of the lack of requited generosity by some (but not all) Western governments towards Ukraine. But the White House is offering him a way out. President Trump's real-estate-deal-cum-peace-plan could reward his aggression in enabling him to snatch a victory for him against the run of play. In this convergence of convenience, both Putin and Trump reveal a shared indifference toward the rules-based international order, the former dismantling it deliberately through invasion, the latter

abandoning it by neglect, having ceased even to pretend that its preservation remains a strategic obligation.

Ten lessons from the war:

1. War as a test of will.
2. Ukraine is not losing, and Russia is not winning.
3. Western politicians have so far been unable to reconcile the difficult choices necessary to ensure a Ukrainian victory.
4. Russia continues to dominate the war of narratives.
5. The ties that bind the West are not as immutable as imagined.
6. Ukraine's continued resistance is a boost for nuclear non-proliferation.
7. Hubris remains a strategic weakness.
8. The Ukrainian economy has also not collapsed, and neither has the Russian one (yet)
9. Diplomacy is war by other means.
10. The rules of international order are being rewritten.

*Read full article at: Four years on – Ten lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine - Daily Friend  
This article originally appeared in RUSI (Royal United Services Institute)*