

# OSINT researchers went viral unpacking the war in Ukraine | Rest of World

By Leo Schwartz

March 9, 2022

Under the pseudonym Intel Crab, University of Alabama sophomore Justin Peden has become an unlikely source of information about the unfolding Ukraine-Russia war. From his dorm room, the 20-year-old sifts through satellite images, TikTok videos, and security feeds, sharing findings like troop movements and aircraft models with more than 220,000 followers on Twitter. Peden said that his posts have reached 20 million people and his follower count has increased by over 50,000 people over the past month, according to his Twitter analytics.

Today, Peden is one of the most prominent open-source intelligence (OSINT) figures on Twitter.

According to analysts, OSINT researchers have existed on the fringes of conflicts since at least 2014, working collaboratively across the world to comb through freely available resources like Google Maps and the satellite imagery service Maxar Technologies. They publicly conduct the type of work that intelligence agencies do behind closed doors.

As Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine, amateur OSINT researchers have gained a particular mainstream traction. Specialized social media accounts on Twitter, like Intel Crab, Calibre Obscura, and Aurora Intel, have transfixed an information-hungry public with an analysis of key movements in Russia's invasion, using newly available technologies to provide real-time analysis of key activities, like the supposed withdrawal of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border or the 40-mile Russian convoy outside of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv.

[...]