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NATO Denies Russia Conducting Military Exercises in English Channel

By The Moscow Times

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A squadron of Russian warships entered the English Channel on Friday but a NATO official dismissed a Russian media report that they were there to conduct military exercises.

Russian news agency RIA quoted the Northern Fleet as saying its vessels, led by anti-submarine ship Severomorsk, had passed through the Strait of Dover and were now in international waters in the Seine Bay to wait for a storm to pass.

"While it is anchored the crew are undertaking a series of exercises on how to tackle infiltrating submarine forces and are training on survival techniques in the case of flooding or fire," RIA quoted the Northern Fleet as saying in a statement.

The Russian Navy could not reached for comment and the Defense Ministry declined to comment on the report.

France's navy confirmed the location of the ships and said it was not unusual to have Russian

warships in the Channel.

"They are not holding exercises. They're just waiting in a zone where they can be several times a year," said the French Navy's information service.

Lieutenant-Colonel Jay Janzen, NATO's military spokesman, also said the alliance was aware of the Russian ships' location.

"Our information indicates that the ships are transiting and have been delayed by weather conditions. They are not exercising in the Channel, as some Russian headlines would have us believe," he said.

Russia has flexed its military muscle recently, with the NATO military alliance reporting more incursions by Russian fighters and long-range bombers.

The Russian maneuvers followed months of tension over Ukraine, where Moscow has annexed the Crimean peninsula and has supported armed separatists opposed to the Kiev government.

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