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Russia Has Armada of Spy Boats Off British Coast – Report

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Russia has a fleet of converted fishing boats equipped with intelligence-gathering equipment near the British east coast, the Daily Mail newspaper reported, citing a retired senior British commander.

"They are very capable trawlers. There are lots of things the Russians want to know and they do go to try and find it out," Lord West of Spithead, a former first sea lord, was quoted as saying, adding that they were used to obtain intelligence on the Britain's nuclear missiles and warships.

The boats, which can intercept voice transmissions up to 320 kilometers away, are also likely monitoring airbases to alert Russian military planes flying close to British airspace if reaction teams are scrambled in response, the report said.

The newspaper cited another senior military source as saying the boats are supporting Russian bombers seen off the east coast and "as far south as Cornwall."

"While they look like fishing vessels they are packed with electronic counter-measures and make no secret of their presence. All they want is to sit and test our reaction times and collate communications," the unnamed source was quoted as saying.

One boat was seen west of Scotland where a NATO military exercise will be conducted next month, the report said.

Russia recently put its Northern Fleet on full alert and has been conducting a large-scale naval exercise as a show of force apparently meant to dwarf a NATO naval drill in Norway.

This week Latvia's military said that it detected at least two Russian submarines in waters near the country. Latvia and Lithuania said Wednesday that NATO jets had been scrambled to intercept half a dozen Russian planes flying over the Baltic Sea.

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