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You Sunk My Battleship: Russian and British Navy Engage In High-Seas Trash-Talk

By Katie Marie Davies

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Reuters

Forget frigates and aircraft carriers: Russia's armed forces have reached full-sail sass in a war of words with the British Navy.

British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon launched the first blow on Jan. 25, when he branded beleaguered Russian aircraft carrier the Admiral Kuznetsov the Kremlin's "ship of shame."

The politician promised that Royal Navy forces would be tracking the ship alongside its battlegroup as they traveled back to base through UK waters. The battlegroup had been stationed in the Mediterranean Sea as part of Russia's operations in Syria until Jan. 6, when the Kremlin announced that they had "completed their mission."

"We will keep a close eye on the Admiral Kuznetsov as it skulks back to Russia; a ship of shame whose mission has only extended the suffering of the Syrian people," Fallon said.

"We are man-marking these vessels every step of the way around the UK as part of our steadfast commitment to keep Britain safe."

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Not to be outdone, the Kremlin has scrambled to put together a pithy putdown of their own, blasting the British naval escort as a way of distracting British taxpayers from the "real state of the Royal Navy."

"Russian warships don't need this kind of senseless escort in the first place," Russian Defense Ministry Spokesperson Major-General Igor Konashenkov told the Interfax news agency on Thursday morning.

The Kremlin was also quick to launch a few snide remarks at Britain's nuclear submarine program, Trident. The British press claimed on Jan 23. that four unreported Trident missile test failures had taken place in 2015, with missiles flying wildly off-course.

"We'd advise Mr. Fallon to pay a little more attention to the British fleet — and according to reports in the British press, he has every reason to do so," Konashenkov said.

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The Admiral Kuznetsov reportedly entered the British Channel on Wednesday. The ship will be tracked by Type 23 Frigate HMS St. Albans alongside Royal Airforce aircraft, a British Navy spokesperson said.

The ships would remain "at a respectful distance," but British sailors would watch "every movement," the spokesperson said. "As an island nation, the security of the seas around our coastline is vital."

The British Navy spent almost £1.4 million ($1.7 million) on tracking Russian warships in 2016 as they first journeyed on their way to Syria, according to information released by regional news outlet The Portsmouth News.

The battlegroup are headed toward the Russian port of Severomorsk, a town in the Murmansk region where Russia's Northern Fleet is headquartered. The journey is expected to take 10 days.

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