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# Russia Says Fired 'Warning' Shots at British Warship Near Crimea

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Russia's Defense Ministry said the British Royal Navy's HMS Defender destroyer violated Russia's borders. **Erik Romanenko / TASS**

A Russian fighter jet and border guard ship have fired "warning" shots at a British warship that the military said violated Russia's borders in the Black Sea near annexed Crimea, the Defense Ministry told state media Wednesday in a claim Britain later denied.

The Russian Navy's Su-24 attack aircraft dropped four bombs along the path of the British Royal Navy's HMS Defender destroyer to "stop" it from further maneuvers after a border patrol ship fired warning shots, the state-run TASS news agency cited the Defense Ministry as saying.

The HMS Defender "did not respond to a warning" about the use of weapons in response to its movements, the Defense Ministry was quoted as saying. The British destroyer left the waters off the coast of Cape Fiolent minutes after the shots were fired, it said.

But the British Defense Ministry soon denied that any warning shots had been fired at the

HMS Defender, adding that "The Royal Navy ship is conducting innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters in accordance with international law."

"We believe the Russians were undertaking a gunnery exercise in the Black Sea and provided the maritime community with prior-warning of their activity," it added.

Russia's Defense Ministry has called on the U.K. to investigate the ship's "dangerous" actions and the Foreign Ministry said that the British ambassador to Moscow would be summoned over the incident.

The Royal Navy said earlier in June that HMS Defender "peeled away" from the U.K.'s carrier strike group in the Mediterranean "to carry out her own set of missions in the Black Sea."

On Wednesday, U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said in a statement that the HMS Defender had been carrying out a "routine transit from Odesa towards Georgia across the Black Sea."

The U.S. Naval Institute's news website reported Monday that HMS Defender's and another NATO warship's open-source intelligence data was faked to make it appear as if they sailed directly to the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

"Positioning two NATO warships at the entrance of a major Russian naval base would be widely seen as a provocative action, based on conflicting claims of sovereignty," USNI News wrote.

Most countries still recognize Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014, as part of Ukraine.

Reacting to the Wednesday's incident, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba slammed Russia's "aggressive and provocative policy" in the Black Sea region, describing it on Twitter as a "constant threat" to Kiev and its allies.

Rob Lee, a doctoral student who follows Russian deployments at King's College London's war studies department, told The Moscow Times that Russia's use of warning shots on a NATO vessel would mark a "new" development.

"[Russia has] conducted some very aggressive naval and aerial intercepts, but this would be new. And certainly a much bigger deal than normal aggressive intercepts. I'm wary of saying unprecedented, but I can't remember this happening as long as I have been following this," Lee said.

"HMS Defender's mission to the Black Sea was a political one — about projecting presence, supporting Kiev and reminding Moscow that its annexation was not forgotten or accepted," tweeted Mark Galeotti, a senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute and expert on Russian security affairs.

"Moscow likewise reacted politically (in its own way), first spoofing GPS signals to try and present Defender and a Dutch frigate as aggressively heading straight for the Russian Black Sea Fleet base at Sevastopol... and now claiming — as they have in the past — to have 'driven' the Royal Navy away by aggressive operations," he added.

Includes reporting from AFP.

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