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Russia Training Dolphins to Defend Black Sea Fleet Against Divers, U.K. Says

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A bottlenose dolphin. **Gregory "Slobirdr" Smith / flickr**

The Russian Navy has bolstered security at its Black Sea Fleet base in annexed Crimea with the use of trained dolphins, Britain's defense ministry said Friday.

Citing satellite imagery, the British military said the number of floating mammal pens in the harbor of Crimea's port city of Sevastopol has nearly doubled from April to June.

The pens are thought to house bottlenose dolphins that "are highly likely intended to counter enemy divers," the British defense ministry said.

The Soviet Union used the Sevastopol base in the late 1960s to train marine mammals for military purposes such as planting explosives on ships or searching for mines. Whether they actually engaged in military activity is disputed, but the dolphins were later used to locate lost military and scientific equipment.

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The Russian Navy denied a 2012 report saying it was developing a program training dolphins to attack enemy divers with knives or pistols attached to their heads. The Soviet program was also thought to have included training on how to kill underwater enemies.

Bottlenose dolphins, the best-known and most common members of the oceanic dolphin family, are known for their cognitive ability and curiosity toward humans.

Britain's defense ministry said Friday that, since the summer of 2022 when the Black Sea Fleet was mauled in the first 200 days since Moscow ordered troops to invade Ukraine, Russia's Navy has invested "major enhancements" to security.

Satellite images showed four layers of nets and booms across Sevastopol harbor as Russian-installed authorities moved to fortify Crimea following a series of attacks on military, energy and transport targets there.

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