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Armed Guards Spotted on Russian 'Shadow Fleet' Vessels, Sweden Says

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Armed personnel in uniform have been spotted aboard vessels linked to Russia's so-called "shadow fleet," Sweden's navy said, as Moscow steps up its military presence along key shipping routes in the Baltic Sea.

Commodore Marko Petkovic, the head of operations for Sweden's navy, told Swedish broadcaster SVT that the individuals were likely employees of private security companies.

He added that Russia's naval activity in the region had become "more permanent and more visible," with warships regularly operating in strategic areas of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland.

"The Russian Navy is periodically present at various hubs in the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea, and appears to be operating there in some way in support of this shadow fleet," Petkovic said.

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Military sources cited by SVT said Russia's actions amounted to a sustained patrol operation near major maritime routes, carried out by the Baltic Fleet.

Western officials use the term "shadow fleet" to describe aging tankers and other vessels Russia employs to ship oil and petroleum products while evading international sanctions imposed over its war in Ukraine.

Reports that Russia had begun deploying warships to escort such tankers emerged in May, when Finnish Defense Minister Antti Häkkänen described the practice as unprecedented.

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