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British Navy Says It Tracked Russian Submarines Surveying Undersea Cables in North Atlantic

By AFP

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The British navy tracked and monitored three Russian submarines suspected of surveying undersea cables and pipelines in the North Atlantic, British Defense Secretary John Healy said Thursday.

Speaking at a Downing Street news conference, Healy said the tracking operation had lasted more than a month and that there was no evidence the Russian vessels had caused any damage to infrastructure.

"Our armed forces left them in no doubt that they were being monitored, that their movements were not covert, as President Putin planned, and that their attempted secret operation had been exposed," Healy told reporters.

"Those Gugi submarines have now left U.K. waters and headed back north," he added.

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Healy said the British Navy and those of allied countries tracked an Akula-class Russian nuclear-powered attack submarine and two specialist submarines from Russia's Main Directorate of Deep Sea Research as they sailed around U.K. territorial waters.

The attack submarine was "a likely decoy to distract" from the other two vessels, which are "designed to survey underwater infrastructure during peacetime and sabotage it in conflict," he said.

British warships dropped sonar buoys "to demonstrate to them that we were monitoring every hour of their operation," Healy added.

"We wanted to ensure that we could warn them that their covert operation had been exposed and reduce the risk that they may attempt any action that could damage our pipelines or our cables," he said.

"I'm confident we have no evidence that there has been any damage."

Separately, Healy responded to criticism in the Daily Telegraph that London was not making good on its recent threats to stop sanctioned vessels from Russia's so-called "shadow fleet" from transiting through U.K. territorial waters.

"We have the military options, and we're ready... to interdict shadow fleet vessels," he said.

He added London's stance was "making Russia reroute its shadow ships... or escort its shadow ships with its own warships" and thereby "making it harder for Putin to pursue his illegal oil revenues".

"We aim, with others, to put more pressure in the coming weeks and months on that activity," Healy said.

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