The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

U.K. Intercepts Russian Shadow Fleet Vessel in English Channel

By AFP

June 14, 2026



Royal Marine Commandos and specially trained National Crime Agency officers boarded the vessel SMYRTOS in the first U.K.-led operation of its kind, said the British defense ministry. **vessel finder.com**

British forces on Sunday intercepted a sanctioned oil tanker belonging to Russia's shadow fleet in the English Channel, the defense ministry said.

The six-hour operation in the early hours was supported by aircraft, including Chinook helicopters, and navy vessels such as the frigate HMS Sutherland.

"In the first U.K.-led operation of its kind, the vessel SMYRTOS was boarded by Royal Marine Commandos and specially trained law enforcement officers from the National Crime Agency, despite Russia's best efforts to evade sanctions and continue fueling its barbaric war with Ukraine," the ministry statement said.

The vessel will now be moved to an anchorage off the south coast of England and monitored,

it added.

“Russia relies on its shadow fleet to fund their conflict in Ukraine and our interdiction delivers a blow to Putin's illegal war,” said defense minister Dan Jarvis.

He said the operation was carried out in “close coordination with the French.”

Disrupting the shadow fleet was “directly bearing down on the resources sustaining Russia's aggression in Ukraine and reducing its capacity to threaten security across Europe and beyond,’ he added.

The U.K. has sanctioned hundreds of vessels suspected of being part of the shadow fleet used by Russia to bypass Western embargoes since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The ships — usually aging tankers with dubious ownership — are banned from accessing U.K. ports and services.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the operation delivered “yet another blow to Russia and reminds those fueling Putin's war in Ukraine that they cannot hide.”

In March, the government announced that British forces would be able to board and seize shadow fleet vessels passing through its waters.

The announcement followed the easing of restrictions by Washington on Russian oil to soften prices sent soaring by the U.S.-Israel war against Iran.

France, Belgium, Finland and other European countries have also recently seized sanction-busting vessels believed to belong to the so-called shadow fleet.

London has said such ships are suspected of damaging undersea cables in the Baltic Sea on several occasions.

The government has said it will propose new legislation aimed at preventing “Russia and other hostile states” from sabotaging vital subsea internet cables.

There have been a series of sea incidents in the Baltic Sea since 2023, when undersea cables and power lines have been damaged.

Military experts and European leaders say Russia has ramped up its “hybrid war” in the strategic region — now bordered entirely by NATO members barring Russia.

Former defense minister John Healey, who resigned this week accusing Starmer of failing to provide sufficient funding to defend Britain, said in April armed forces had tracked and deterred three Russian submarines on an alleged month-long “covert operation” in U.K. waters in the North Atlantic near vital undersea cables and pipelines.

Britain is connected to the rest of the world via around 64 major undersea telecoms cables.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/06/14/uk-intercepts-russian-shadow-fleet-vessel-in-english-channel-a93009