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The Daily Telegraph

Russian 'spy ships' threaten to sabotage UK energy supply

Penny must drop over incursions, say MPs after 'ghost' trawlers with armed guards alleged to be monitoring wind farms and pipelines

By Joe Barnes, Gareth Corfield and Ben Riley-Smith

RUSSIAN spy ships are mapping wind farms and key communication cables off the coast of Britain as part of plans to sabotage critical infrastructure.

Details of the covert "ghost ship" missions were published as Downing Street and GCHQ chiefs warned of a surge in Russian-aligned hackers aiming to disrupt or destroy energy facilities such as power stations.

A fleet of Russian boats, often disguised as fishing trawlers or research vessels but with armed guards, have been observed by European intelligence agencies conducting mass reconnaissance close to British coastal energy and communications networks.

Possible targets are believed to include internet cables, offshore wind farms and connectors carrying electricity and gas pipelines, an investigation found. One underwater "research" ship was tracked touring wind farms off the east coast of the UK, while another is thought to have entered the Moray Firth in Scotland on Nov 10 last year.

Tobias Ellwood, the Tory chairman of the Commons defence committee, said "the penny must drop" over Russia's attempts to undermine British security as he called for an expansion of armed forces in wake of the revelations.

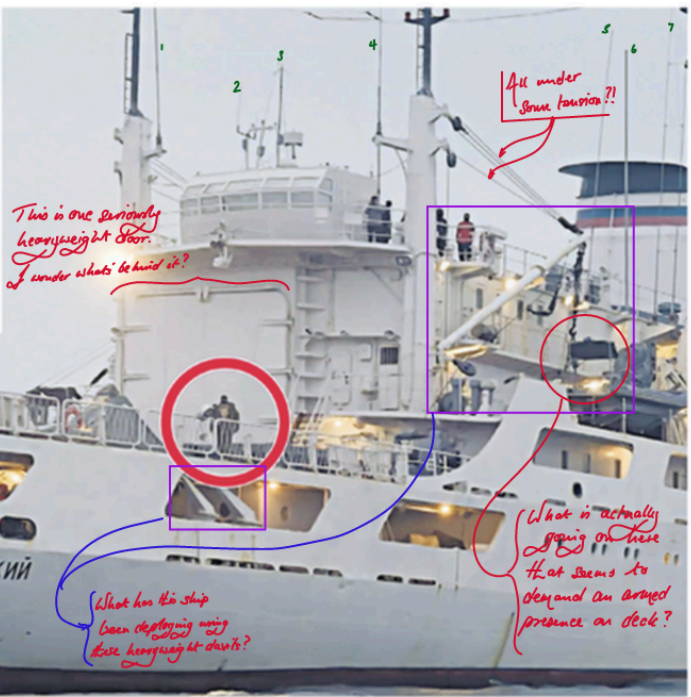
Last night GCHQ chiefs warned that Western nations were battling a surge in Russian hacking activity as Vladimir Putin's cyber troops set their sights on critical infrastructure.

Oliver Dowden, the Cabinet Office minister, said Russian-aligned hackers who have been attacking Ukraine had "turned their attention to the UK".

Criminal hacker groups in Russia have been targeting Western countries in recent months, especially Nato members supporting Ukraine. Experts say that "patriotic" young Russians are carrying out cyber attacks against Western organisations and businesses.

National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) bosses have issued a formal warning to critical national infrastructure operators to caution them about the renewed threat.

Lindy Cameron, chief executive of the NCSC, said: "If the UK is to be the



Scandinavian broadcasters identified the Admiral Vladimirsky, above, as a possible spy ship; footage showed a man armed with a military-grade rifle, inset

safest place to live and work online, then resilience must urgently move to the top of our security shopping list."

GCHQ's security arm also warned of an expansion in mercenary hacker-for-hire operations, in which cyber companies offer their services to the highest bidder.

Details of the Russian sabotage plot in the North Sea emerged from a joint investigation by the public broadcasters of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Russia is thought to be drawing up plans in the event of a full-scale war with the West.

There has been an increased focus on the safety of North Sea infrastructure amid heightened tensions with Russia, particularly in the wake of the attack on the Nord Stream pipeline.

Ben Wallace, the Defence Secretary,

Russian vessel's route around North Sea windfarms



warned last year that Norway's oil and gas infrastructure was "particularly vulnerable" as it had become Europe's main supplier. The Royal Navy is purchasing two dedicated subsea surveillance ships, which are expected to come into service this year.

Senior officials from AIVD, the Dutch equivalent of MI5 and MI6, also warned that Russia had been caught mapping installations in the North Sea after a vessel was intercepted near a wind farm last autumn.

In February, a Russian ship without an automatic identification system, which lets the vessel be tracked, entered Belgian and Dutch waters.

At the time, the Dutch intelligence services accused Moscow of "trying to map what the Dutch energy supply looks like". About 50 Russian "ghost

ships" are believed to be operating in the North Sea. The investigation by the Scandinavian broadcasters identified the Admiral Vladimirsky, officially registered as an oceanographic research vessel, as a possible spy ship.

Footage of the ship showed a man armed with a military-grade rifle and wearing a balaclava was on board as their journalists approached it.

Mr Ellwood said: "We simply can no longer protect our near seas and, rightly, step forward further afield with our current peacetime-sized Navy, Army and Airforce."

An MoD spokesman said: "We increased Royal Navy presence patrols after the Nord Stream incident and have invested £65 million in the first of our two Multi-Role Ocean Surveillance ships"

Health chiefs fear a 'summer of discontent'

By Laura Donnelly, Daniel Martin

Russian spy ships are plotting to sabotage Britain's critical infrastructure, the Daily Telegraph reports. The paper says the "ghost ship" missions are believed to be targeting internet

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Braverman given powers to ignore ECHR

By Charles Hymas

SUELLA BRAVERMAN is to be granted new powers to ignore attempts by European human rights judges to block migrant deportation flights under plans to be announced today.

off a revolt by some 60 Tory MPs who have been demanding that the nation ally and deport them swiftly to their

They have also secured promised changes to toughen up the Bill to prevent lawyers in Britain using domestic human rights or other legislation to block deportation flights. Such claims

to be targeting internet

They believe the measures will act as a deterrent to illegal Channel crossings as it was confirmed in court documents