Shadow fleet set to be interdicted in UK waters in latest blow to Russia

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British military will be able to board shadow fleet vessels transiting UK waters as the UK steps up its pressure on Putin.

- UK forces given permission to board sanctioned ships transiting UK waters
- Move is the latest blow to Putin’s shadow fleet operation, fuelling his illegal war in Ukraine
- Comes as the Prime Minister addresses the Joint Expeditionary Force Summit in Helsinki today, reiterating the UK’s steadfast support for Ukraine

British military will be able to board shadow fleet vessels transiting UK waters as the UK steps up its pressure on Putin.

The Prime Minister has agreed that the UK Armed Forces and law enforcement officers will now be able to interdict vessels that have been sanctioned by the UK and are transiting through UK waters.

It follows the Royal Navy supporting allies with the monitoring and tracking of several shadow fleet ships to enable interdiction in European and Mediterranean waters in recent weeks.

The move is the latest blow to Russia’s shadow fleet, which is fuelling Putin’s barbaric war in Ukraine, and comes as the Prime Minister arrives at the Joint Expeditionary Force Summit in Helsinki today [26 March] to discuss security in the region and how partners can combat an increasingly aggressive Russia.

A number of JEF allies, including Finland, Sweden and Estonia, have carried out recent operations against suspected illegal shadow fleet vessels in the Baltic, closing off critical maritime routes to Russia’s malign operation.

By joining JEF partners in interdicting shadow fleet vessels, the UK will put a further stranglehold on the shadow fleet, closing off UK waters, including the Channel, for sanctioned vessels.

This will in turn force operators to either divert to longer, financially painful routes, or risk being detained by British forces.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said:

> We are living in an increasingly volatile and dangerous world, facing threats from different fronts across the world every day.
> As Prime Minister, my first duty is to keep this country safe and protect British interests here and abroad.
> Putin is rubbing his hands at the war in the Middle East because he thinks higher oil prices will let him line his pockets. That’s why we’re going after his shadow fleet even harder, not just keeping Britain safe but starving Putin’s war machine of the dirty profits that fund his barbaric campaign in Ukraine.
> He and his cronies should be in no doubt, we will always defend our sovereignty and

stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.

As an island nation built on maritime trade, the Arctic and High North is vital to the UK's prosperity and British livelihoods.

The region is the only place where Russia, through its formidable Northern Fleet, can directly threaten the lifelines that sustain and protect us: food, energy, undersea data cables, and the sea lines of communication that connect the US to Europe.

UK military have been tracking the shadow fleet for a number of years and following the successful US operation to seize tanker Bella 1, which UK assets supported, Ministers ordered the development of plans and options to carry out similar operations against further Russian shadow fleet ships.

Military and law enforcement specialists have been put through their paces in preparation for a number of scenarios in recent weeks, including boarding vessels that don't surrender, are armed, or use high tech pervasive surveillance to evade capture.

Each target ship will be individually considered by law enforcement, military and energy market specialists before a recommendation is made to ministers and an operation is executed.

Following the detention of a ship, criminal proceedings may be brought against the against the owners, operators and crew, for breaches of UK sanctions legislation.

Around 75% of Russia's crude oil is transported by Putin's decrepit fleet and aging fleet of ships. Alongside allies, the UK has imposed sanctions on 544 Russian shadow fleet vessels.

The UK is calling for further coordination on seizing shadow fleet vessels between JEF Allies, further underlining our commitment to the region and deterring hostile activity by Russia.

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