



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

The threat of international terrorism from Russian oceanography laboratories



Russia has no reason to map, observe, or attack the cable infrastructure at the bottom of the Baltic and North Sea to harm Ukraine. Ukraine is connected by terrestrial communication cables to Europe, and Russia knows this.

It revealed this when, as part of the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in 2014, it cut off the main terrestrial cable connection with the rest of the mainland to take control of the Crimean internet infrastructure.

Why not repeat this with several of the most technologically developed European countries and NATO members with access to the Baltic and North Seas?

Increased patrolling under Putin

Researchers of the Nordic public TV service discovered a Russian spy mission in the North Sea on the Admiral Vladimirsky ship, officially registered for oceanographic research.

But where did the masked men in uniforms with automatic rifles come from? Why were they in the floating scientific laboratory reported in the documentary jointly produced by Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, and Finnish public television?

The North Sea and the Baltic Sea are the "natural" environment for Russian military and intelligence operations, dating back to the Cold War.

Russian patrols collected intelligence data, assessed weaknesses in the security systems of surrounding countries, and recorded and collected information.

However, during the rule of Vladimir Putin, such activities have drastically increased with Russia's conflicting behaviour towards Europe. The purpose of the previously "legitimate" intelligence operations at sea has also changed.

"There had been a phenomenal increase in

Russian submarine and underwater activity over the past 20 years", said Admiral Tony Radakin, head of the UK's armed forces, in an interview for The Times last year.

"That is where predominantly all the world's information and traffic travels. Russia has grown the capability to put at threat those undersea cables and potentially exploit those undersea cables", said Admiral Radakin, adding that an attempt to cut off the submarine cable system would be an "act of war".

Sabotage experience

The discovery of the Scandinavian journalists should cause alarm for the security systems of the Nordic countries, the UK, but also for Europe and NATO, given that the seabed of the Baltic and North Seas are intertwined with critical cable infrastructure.

Russia has shown that it has experience with such sabotage actions to cut off communications with a territory with which it is in conflict.

With the aggression against Ukraine, and considering the ongoing conflict with NATO and the "collective West", Russia shows that it has a large, strategic military and political goal to cause as much damage as possible to the countries it considers enemies and an "existential threat" as was written in the latest Russian foreign policy strategy.

Russian diversion of undersea installations in the Baltic and North Sea zones is a real possibility, and this operation might be under way, according to the Scandinavian TV documentary.

What would be the consequences of a submarine accident?

"There are several imagined Russian objectives to sever a cable. These include damaging

cables in operations short of war blocking military or government communications in the early stages of a conflict, shutting down internet access for a targeted population, sabotaging an economic competitor, or causing global disruption for strategic purposes. These acts can be either pursued individually or simultaneously”, reports an extensive study from mid-2022 for the European Parliament, which concerns security threats to undersea communications cables and infrastructure and their consequences for the EU.

There is no doubt that Russia would greatly benefit from damaging vital energy and overseas communication channels that connect some of Ukraine's biggest supporters in its resistance to Russian aggression. On the other hand, Russia does not have brakes that would prevent it from undertaking this or a similar act of international terrorism.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has been mentioned several times in the UN as illegal and directed against world peace, thus grossly violating the UN Charter. Its leader, Vladimir Putin, was indicted before the International Criminal Court for war crimes committed in Ukraine under his supreme command.

Russia was ultimately declared responsible by a Dutch court and the European Court of Human Rights for the 2014 missile downing of a Malaysia Airlines plane and the killing of 298 people. Due to its aggression against Ukraine, serious violations of international law, and numerous crimes committed by its troops on Ukrainian soil, Russia was declared a state sponsor of terrorism by the European Parliament, Poland, and the three Baltic states.

Motive and interest in destruction

In these circumstances, where a large number of countries have ostracised Russia as a bully and even a terrorist state, Russia has little reason to refrain from undertaking sabotage and acts of international terrorism wherever it

gets the chance. The undersea of the Baltic and the North Sea is a tempting point for Russian destructive operations, and its interest in causing significant damage to its "enemies" from NATO is unquestionable. Admiral Vladimirovsky and dozens of similar state and civilian vessels whose movements have been monitored by the services of states in Northern Europe are not involved in civilian missions.

As a resource, they are involved in their country's war effort, including acts of sabotage and international terrorism. Russia has provided enough evidence that it is ready, equipped, and interested in such a course of action.