

Tense shipping situation in the Baltic as Russia hits out at neighbours

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NATO



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The shipping situation in the Baltic is tense with Russia trading barbs with its neighbours and militaries getting involved.

Poland was forced yesterday to intervene after a ship from the Russian shadow fleet was seen performing suspicious manoeuvres near a power cable connecting Poland with Sweden. Meanwhile, Estonia and Russia have been threatening each other over attempts by the Baltic state to clamp down on shadow tankers, something that saw both militaries chase after tankers in recent days.

Dmitry Peskov, a spokesperson for Russian president Vladimir Putin, told reporters yesterday that Russia would defend its vessels in the Baltic.

“As recent events related to an attempted pirate attack on one of the tankers have shown, Russia has demonstrated it is capable of responding quite harshly,” Peskov said.

This was not the first time Estonia's tactics have been labelled as pirate actions this week. At a United Nations Security Council meeting on Tuesday to discuss maritime, Russian representative Vasily Nebenzya called out Estonia's decision to pursue a shadow tanker as "comparable to piracy".

At the same Security Council meeting, António Guterres, secretary-general of the UN, commented: "As threats to maritime security are becoming more complex and interconnected, enhanced coordination and stronger maritime governance are essential."

Nice in the south of France is set to host the 2025 UN Ocean Conference next month.

"Without maritime security, there can be no global security," Guterres stressed.

Seabed gas pipelines, power cables and fibre optic cables have all been attacked – likely by merchant ships dragging their anchors – in recent months across the Baltic, forcing NATO to establish Baltic Sentry, a naval protection operation. Baltic Sentry involves a range of assets, including frigates, submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, and drones.

A joint statement from the heads of state or government of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden earlier this year noted: "Russia's use of the so-called shadow fleet poses a particular threat to the maritime and environmental security in the Baltic Sea region and globally. This reprehensible practice also threatens the integrity of undersea infrastructure, increases risks connected to sea-dumped chemical munitions, and significantly supports funding of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine."