

Boarded tanker linked to nine drone attacks

Tracking data puts vessel in Russian shadow fleet at scene of incursions into Denmark and Germany

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THE suspected Russian shadow fleet ship raided by the French may be linked to nine separate drone attacks on European airports and infrastructure.

The Boracay, an 18-year-old tanker left Russia and sailed through the Baltic sea over the last two weeks where a string of mysterious swarms of drones were launched.

A Telegraph analysis of tracking data puts the ship at the scene of the drone incursions, which Western leaders have warned are part of Moscow's "hybrid war" against Nato and its allies.

Experts and some European leaders have speculated that the ship was used to launch the drones that caused mayhem by shutting down public infrastructure and led to increasing military patrols. The tactic would represent a new front in Russia's strategy against the European allies of Ukraine.

Data provided by MarineTraffic, the ship tracking website, puts the Boracay within 50 nautical miles south of Copenhagen on Sept 22 when mysterious drone activity brought its airport to a standstill for hours. Oslo airport, about 325 miles north of Copenhagen, was also closed during this time. However, local authorities in Norway have since said the incidents weren't linked.

The tanker was also observed skirting around Denmark's northernmost tip before sailing south down its western coast between Sept 23 and 25. During those days the Danish airports of Aalborg, Esbjerg, Sønderborg and Skrydstrup were all closed after drones were spotted in the skies nearby.

On Sept 25, a swarm of drones was spotted spying on critical infrastructure in the German city of Kiel. Officials said they were sizing up a power plant, a military shipyard, a key shipping canal, a hospital and the regional parliament. At the time, the Boracay can be traced to Germany's North Sea coast.

The tanker later passed through the English Channel into French waters, where it eventually came to anchor off the coast of the port of Saint-Nazaire.

The Russian shadow fleet is better known for funding Vladimir Putin's war machine by operating outside Western regulations to make sanctions-busting crude oil shipments.

A Swedish defence source said its military had long tracked ship-launched drones arriving on its shores from the Nordic and Baltic seas. But the connection between the Boracay and the incident in Copenhagen is the first publicised example of a shadow fleet vessel being used for this purpose.

The vessel was built in 2007 as the Pacific Apollo, before being renamed the Virgus 13. Since 2020, it has been relabelled as the P Fos, Odysseus, Varuna and Kiwala before landing on its current name, although in some records it is also currently called the Pushpa.

The vessel was sanctioned by the European Union under its Kiwala name in February. It is currently registered to Baaj Shipping Limited, a brass plate company in the Seychelles. While fraudulently flagged in Benin, as well as multiple changes, the ship has rotated through other fake flags from Africa.

The Boracay has also frequently changed the organisation which classes its standards. When it was built, it was classed by the American Bureau of Shipping before moving to the Lloyd's Register before this clarification was withdrawn in June last year. It has since been classed by a Russian register.

The ship was en route to a port in

India, the second largest importer of Russian crude oil, behind China. According to commercially available data, it was last inspected in a port in Estonia in April, where 40 deficiencies were discovered, with invalid certificates for everything from radio equipment to onboard safety equipment.

"It's not that it has failed its MOT, it's driving without a licence, without an MOT that's valid, and possibly rusting, bits falling off, you name it," Peter Aylott, head of policy at the UK Chamber of Shipping, said. Estonia only released the vessel, then named Kiwala, when Djibouti accepted the ship as one of its own, having previously denied it being registered to the country. Months after being released, the ship was damaged by a limpet mine.

There is little way of knowing how seaworthy the ship is without human intelligence, which is often provided to British authorities by contract agents who have carried out work on it.

The changing of names and flags is a routine part of the deception by Russia to circumvent sanctions when passing through European waters. Experts have raised concerns that use of these ageing vessels with obscure ownership and no insurance is a risk to the environment.

The Boracay was detained by authorities in Brest on Wednesday. The city's prosecutor Stephane Kellenberger said the two crew members had identified themselves as the ship's captain and first officer. According to the BBC, the captain, a Chinese national, was charged last night with one count of refusing to follow instructions from the navy.

President Emmanuel Macron this week said: "There were some serious offences committed by this crew, which justify the current judicial procedure."



The French navy approach the Boracay before boarding her in the Bay of Biscay

Big bang theory
The Russian Defence Ministry has released a video showing a Giatsint-S self-propelled gun firing towards defensive positions at an undisclosed location in Ukraine.





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