

# Gangster state Russia - Boris Johnson Defies Vladimir Putin's Claim to Crimea

Date: 29 June 2021 at 10:00

Subject: Gangster state Russia - Boris Johnson Defies Vladimir Putin's Claim to Crimea

(The Crimea has been Russian since Catherine the Great and is still vital to Russia. Is Boris mad to behave to recklessly? Does he think that he can brow beat Russia as he tyrannically brow beats his own people? China Joe has enough problems of his own making everywhere and needs no more threats to global peace. Editor BFF)

## Boris Johnson Defies Vladimir Putin's Claim to Crimea

By Patrick J. Buchanan



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Tuesday - June 29, 2021

**"Britain's challenge to Russia, a few kilometers off Crimea, could have resulted in a shooting incident that could have forced a U.S. response against Russia. And that raises some serious questions: ...Did President Joe Biden or the Pentagon tell Johnson that if Defender were attacked, U.S. forces would have their back?"**

About that clash between a British destroyer and Russian warplanes and warships in the Black Sea last week there are conflicting versions.

The Kremlin version is the more dramatic.

HMS Defender, says Moscow, entered the Black Sea, made port in Odessa, Ukraine, and then sailed for Batumi on the coast of Georgia.

However, the British warship traversed Russia's territorial waters at the tip of the Crimean peninsula, near Sevastopol, Russia's principal naval base on the Black Sea.

The destroyer, say the Russians, had to be diverted by shellfire from a patrol boat and bombs dropped in its path by Sukhoi fighters.

London's version: Defender sailed through waters off Crimea that belong to Ukraine. Russian gunfire was far off and unthreatening. No dropped bombs impeded the destroyer's passage.

Yet, according to The New York Times, BBC correspondent Jonathan Beale, who was on board Defender, has "published video footage showing as many as 20 Russian warplanes buzzing the ship and a Russian Coast Guard vessel drawing close alongside."

In brief, this naval encounter was serious business.

Defender's captain, Cmdr. Vince Owen, made it clear his ship sailed close by Crimea deliberately "to assert the position that Crimea and the waters around it legally belong to Ukraine."

Added Owen: "The Royal Navy and U.K. will always call out states that do not follow international order."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov described Defender's actions as a "deliberate and premeditated provocation." Deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov warned that the next time a provocation like this occurs, Russia "may drop bombs and not just in the path but right on target."

With the incident over, where do Downing Street and the Kremlin stand now?

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government and the Royal Navy have declared it to be their right to use warships to send a message to Moscow that Crimea belongs to Kyiv. Moscow has responded: Send that message again, and you may find your warship at the bottom of the Black Sea.

This is not an unserious matter.

If the Brits repeat this exercise, which they see as a right, a duty and a mission, we could witness a Russian attack on a British warship.

This would trigger Article 5 of the NATO treaty that requires all member nations to treat an attack on one as an attack on all.

Britain's challenge to Russia, a few kilometers off Crimea, could have resulted in a shooting incident that could have forced a U.S. response against Russia. And that raises some serious questions:

Did Johnson inform us he was about to issue this direct challenge to Moscow? Or were the Americans left in the dark?

Did President Joe Biden or the Pentagon tell Johnson that if Defender were attacked, U.S. forces would have

their back?

With this clash off Crimea, a peninsula Russia regards as vital and we have never regarded as vital, we could have been drawn into a conflict by our ally, Britain, which could not prevail against Vladimir Putin's Russia without the military assistance of the United States.

There is another matter that makes this problematic.

To reach the Black Sea, Defender peeled off from a flotilla centered on the aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth, which is in the Mediterranean.

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That flotilla is headed to the Indo-Pacific region and likely to traverse the South China Sea, whose islets, reefs and rocks are the claimed national territories of China.

Are the British warships going to emulate the U.S. naval challenges to China's claims to those tiny pieces of land in the South China Sea?

Also, Monday was the first day of the 12-day Exercise Sea Breeze 2021 in the Black Sea, hosted by the U.S. Sixth Fleet and Ukrainian navy.

These exercises have been held yearly since the end of the 20th century, and the 2021 roster of participants is the largest yet

The exercises will involve 32 nations, 32 ships, 5,000 troops and 40 planes. Among the participants are 17 NATO nations, including all three NATO allies on the Black Sea — Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey — and two aspiring NATO nations on the Black Sea — Ukraine and Georgia.

Are warships from any of these 32 nations going to follow the example of HMS Defender and sail close to the Russian naval base of Sevastopol? Are the Brits going to challenge Putin's claim to Crimea again? Or will they, chastened, avoid a confrontation?

The U.S. does not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, but we have not threatened or used force to alter that reality.

For no vital U.S. interest is imperiled in Russia's control of Crimea and its 2 million people. After all, czarist and Bolshevik Russia controlled that peninsula from the time of Catherine the Great to the time of Mikhail Gorbachev.

The U.S. should tell Boris Johnson that if he wants to provoke the Russian navy in the Black Sea, he should not assume that, if a collision comes, the U.S. Sixth Fleet will pull his chestnuts out of the fire.

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*-- For the Cause!*

*Linda Muller - WebMaster for Patrick J. Buchanan  
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<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/25/miscalculation-russian-cat-mouse-game-could-lead-full-blown/>

'Miscalculation' in Russian cat and mouse game could lead to full blown war, warns Army chief

Standoff in Black Sea involving Royal Navy destroyer was the type of incident that risked unwarranted escalation, says Head of Armed Forces

By [Jack Hardy](#)

25 June 2021 • 4:56pm



General Sir Nick Carter warns the risk of an ‘unwarranted escalation’ involving Britain is ‘the thing that keeps me awake in bed at night’ | CREDIT: Stefan Rousseau/PA

A “miscalculation” in the cat and mouse game with Russia could lead to full blown war, the head of the Armed Forces has warned, after a [tense confrontation in the Black Sea](#) this week.

General Sir Nick Carter, the chief of the defence staff, said the risk of an “unwarranted escalation” involving Britain was “the thing that keeps me awake in bed at night”.

There was a [standoff between Britain and Russia](#) when a Royal Navy destroyer passed through a contested part of the Black Sea on Wednesday.

Russia considers the waters to be its own after the [annexation of Crimea](#) in 2014, but it is recognised by Britain as sovereign Ukrainian territory.

HMS Defender provoked Russian forces into firing warning shots and dropping four bombs close to the ship, according to the Russian defence ministry, but this claim is disputed by Downing Street.

Reflecting on the incident during a talk at the Chalke Valley History Festival, Sir Nick, who has [pushed back his retirement](#) to stay in post until the end of the year, said: “The thing that keeps me awake in bed at night is a miscalculation that comes from unwarranted escalation.

“The sort of thing we saw in the Black Sea on Wednesday is the sort of thing it could come from.

“It wouldn’t have done on that occasion, but it’s the type of thing one needs to think quite hard about.”

He had earlier claimed the standoff was an illustration of the “battle of the narratives” that can take place in modern warfare amid the [rise of disinformation and fake news](#).

“That was brought vividly to life I would suggest by the incident in the Black Sea which is causing great excitement in the media at the moment,” he said.

“That is classically an example of a battle of the narratives. And the jury’s out as to who won that battle.”

It came after Britain rejected Russia’s account of events, with the Prime Minister’s official spokesman saying the UK and other countries had been informed by Russia it was undertaking a “gunnery exercise” near to where HMS Defender was sailing.

“They provided us and others with prior warning of this activity,” the spokesman added.

Sir Nick, 62, also warned that Britain’s opponents were “evolving at pace”, adding: “If you look at some of the technologies China and Russia have developed, they are very worrisome.

“They are making us somewhat vulnerable.”

It has meant Britain now faces “mega competition” for people with science and technology skills, as technology such as AI, drones and cyber attacks is expected to become key in future conflicts.

Sir Nick said the military was now “anxious for data analysts, data scientists and engineers”.

“I never would have imagined this 10 years ago,” he said.

The Armed Forces chief voiced concern that the education system was not doing enough to equip the next generation of children with the skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) now desperately needed by the military.

He said: “From a military perspective, we are finding it very challenging to draw into the military the STEM skills we need, but also to retain them.

“My judgement is that this may well be because the education system is not developing enough people with those skills but I’m not really qualified to comment on the curriculum in schools, I’m afraid, just the output of it, perhaps.”The Army has tried to tap into the popularity of video games to draw new recruits into its ranks, including an announcement that it was trialling the use of [virtual reality technology in its training](#).

[https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/24/exclusive-dominic-raab-warned-mod-royal-navys-crimea-plans/?li\\_source=LI&li\\_medium=liftigniter-rhr](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/24/exclusive-dominic-raab-warned-mod-royal-navys-crimea-plans/?li_source=LI&li_medium=liftigniter-rhr)

Exclusive: Dominic Raab warned MoD about Royal Navy's Crimea plans

Foreign Secretary argued Moscow could seek to exploit HMS Defender’s voyage through the Black Sea

*By Lucy Fisher*, DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR and *Danielle Sheridan*, POLITICAL AND DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT  
24 June 2021 • 9:30pm Dominic Raab raised concerns about the Ministry of Defence’s plans for a Royal Navy warship to sail through contested [waters around Crimea this week](#). The Telegraph has learned.

The Foreign Secretary warned in advance that Moscow could seek to exploit HMS Defender’s voyage through the Black Sea under the route proposed by Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, it is understood.

Defence sources claimed the decision was escalated to Downing Street for the Prime Minister to make the final call. Instructions were passed to the Type-45 Destroyer on Monday.

The discussions within Government show that risks were identified in the proposed mission, although all parties are said to have supported the right of a British warship to conduct a legal innocent passage through the sea.

A diplomatic row flared up between London and Moscow on Wednesday over the warship’s route within 12 miles of the Crimean shoreline.

#### Crimea's annexation

Russia, riled by the presence of Nato navies in the Black Sea, claimed HMS Defender sailed through its territorial waters in a “provocation”.

Britain does not recognise Russia’s illegal [annexation of Crimea in 2014](#), and considers the sea around the peninsula’s coast to be Ukrainian territorial waters.

Regardless of the conflicting claims, international law allows for any vessel to travel through territorial waters if on a direct route between two points on “innocent passage”.

Mr Wallace highlighted to Parliament on Thursday that HMS Defender took such a “direct route using a traffic separation scheme” during the incident.

Boris Johnson also weighed in, declaring that HMS Defender was “entirely right” to voyage through the contested waters around Crimea.

The Prime Minister's intervention came as Moscow threatened to retaliate if there was a repeat of the incident.

The Russian Government has accused the warship of a "dangerous move" and claimed Russian forces fired warning shots and dropped four bombs nearby as it came within the contested waters.

The Moscow authorities also summoned the UK defence attaché to receive a formal castigation on Wednesday, then released footage of the meeting, as well as a film shot from the cockpit of a military aircraft flying over the British warship.



Dramatic eyewitness reports from on board HMS Defender, seen here arriving at the Black Sea port of Odessa, described Russian fighter jets buzzing the ship | CREDIT: Sergey Smolentsev/REUTERS

Downing Street rejected Russia's characterisation of events at sea, insisting it was wrong to say firing shots were fired at the Royal Navy ship or that bombs were dropped in its path. No 10 also said Russia had provided advance warning of its plans for a "gunnery exercise" in the area.

Dramatic eyewitness reports from on board HMS Defender described Russian fighter jets buzzing the ship and two Russian coastguard vessels harassing it.

Mr Johnson on Thursday evaded confirming whether he had personally authorised HMS Defender's voyage. Speaking to reporters at a barracks in Aldershot, he said: "These are a matter for the MoD but if you want my view I think it was wholly appropriate to use international waters."

#### Freedom of navigation

He added: "It was entirely right that we should indicate the law and pursue freedom of navigation in the way that we did, take the shortest route between two points, and that's what we did."

His official spokesman also refused to be drawn on whether Mr Johnson personally authorised the mission, telling reporters: "I'm not going to get into operational military decision-making."

A defence source claimed that a "dust up" had erupted because the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) had raised concerns about HMS Defender sailing through contested waters.



Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov: 'We may appeal to reason and demand to respect international law. If it doesn't help, we may drop bombs and not just in the path but right on target if colleagues don't get it otherwise' | CREDIT: Marat Abulkhatin/TASS via Getty Images

The insider told The Telegraph: "The whole dispute was between Raab and Wallace, then it went to the PM for a decision. The decision was sent to Defender on Monday that she was to take innocent passage through those waters."

Whitehall insiders on Thursday night insisted there had been no disagreements within Government over the proposed mission and suggestions to the contrary were "unfounded".

An MoD source said: "We are all one big happy family." An FCDO source said Mr Raab "is supportive of HMS Defender's right of innocent passage through Ukrainian waters".

A Government spokesman said the warship's route was "long planned and entirely in accordance with international law", adding: "The route taken was the most direct, via an internationally recognised route between Ukraine and Georgia."

'We may drop bombs'

Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, said on Thursday that "the inviolability of the Russian borders is an absolute imperative", adding that it will be protected "by all means, diplomatic, political and military if needed".

Asked what Russia would do if a similar episode happened again, he said: "We may appeal to reason and demand to respect international law.

"If it doesn't help, we may drop bombs and not just in the path but right on target if colleagues don't get it otherwise."

Tensions in UK-Russia relations simmered this week just as France and Germany were reported to be seeking to build bridges between the European Union and Moscow.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman said it was "a matter for Germany and France", but added: "We would obviously support engagement with Russia in order to deliver tough messages and encourage a change in their behaviour."

Tobias Ellwood: UK becoming 'risk averse'



'The South China Sea, the Black Sea, the Arctic, all require constant patrolling so that civilian vessels feel safe to use them as they are legally permitted to' | CREDIT: Andrew Matthews/PA Wire

Meanwhile, Tobias Ellwood has warned the UK is becoming "risk averse" as he called on the Royal Navy to have a larger surface fleet, writes Danielle Sheridan.

The former defence minister told The Telegraph there was international "determination to step forward and challenge contested waters" around the world, although he cautioned the Navy was too small in size to carry out such a gargantuan task.

"The South China Sea, the Black Sea, the Arctic, all require constant patrolling so that civilian vessels feel safe to use them as they are legally permitted to," Mr Ellwood said.

However, he cautioned that to do so the navy needed to double the size of our vessels, as failing to do so leaves the force "overstretched".

Mr Ellwood said it was "so important that the West starts to regroup" as he cautioned that the UK has become "risk averse".

Taiwan Straits

The Telegraph previously revealed that HMS Queen Elizabeth [would not be sailing through the contested Taiwan Straits](#) on her operational maiden voyage.

Speaking to the Today programme Mr Ellwood said while he did not believe the aircraft carrier should sail through those waters, he did believe the Navy should send a destroyer in order to stand up to China.

It comes as a former United Nations commander warned Britain has "cut off our nose to spite our face" by reducing the number of British soldiers in the Integrated Review. Conservative MP Bob Stewart, who led peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, condemned the Government's move to cut the size of the Army by 10,000 to 72,500 soldiers by 2025.

Speaking in the Commons on Thursday afternoon, Mr Ellwood said: "The ability to seize and hold ground, to separate warring factions, to deliver humanitarian aid, to assist with civil authorities – such as tackling Covid-19 – to win over hearts and minds, to restore law and order and to respond to natural disasters, and to carry out countless other diverse tasks, that requires people, it requires professionals, it requires soldiers, sailors and air personnel, and it's wrong to reduce those numbers."

Mr Stewart said he entirely agreed with Mr Ellwood, adding: "What we need, and we have operation after operation, is manpower. We've just cut it by 10,000.

"I can tell you having commanded soldiers on the ground in peacekeeping, we have actually cut off our nose to spite our face.

"We require boots on the ground, we require soldiers and I entirely endorse what he [Mr Ellwood] has said."

[Russia launches largest submarine in 30 years](#)

## Russia launches largest submarine in 30 years

Packed with nuclear firepower and able to sabotage seabed internet cables, the West fears it will be used in the Arctic and North Atlantic

By [Theo Merz](#) MOSCOW

27 June 2021 • 4:45pm





The Belgorod is currently undergoing manufacturer's tests and is set to be handed over to the Russian state towards the end of 2021 | CREDIT: Twitter

Russia has tested a giant new nuclear submarine in open waters for the first time, just days after a tense standoff in the Black Sea with Britain involving a Royal Navy destroyer.

The 'Belgorod', believed to be the largest submarine developed anywhere in the world in 30 years, was trialed in the White Sea over the weekend, according to Russian state media.

Once approved for use, the vessel will be capable of launching nuclear strikes with six intercontinental 'Poseidon' torpedoes.

It will also act as a mothership for smaller, deep-diving submarines with robotic arms that can tamper with or even cut vital cables that lie on the seafloor.

The Royal Navy announced earlier this year that it would deploy a 'spy ship' specifically to stop such submarines sabotaging Britain's internet through such tactics.

The Belgorod, the exact specifications of which are not known, is currently undergoing manufacturer's tests and is set to be handed over to the Russian state towards the end of 2021.

It is set to serve in the country's Pacific Fleet, sources close to the Russian Defense Ministry told state media.

But there are concerns in the West that it will be deployed to the Arctic and North Atlantic, where Moscow has significantly increased its submarine activity in recent years.

Last month, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told the Telegraph that Moscow was the UK's "number one adversary threat" and that Britain's waters were "regularly visited" by Russian ships.

Russian naval assets have been detected by the UK more than 150 times since 2013.

The testing of the Belgorod comes just days after a confrontation with Britain in the Black Sea, when a Royal Navy defender passed through contested waters.

It was an area that Russia has claimed as its own since its annexation of Crimea in 2014. Britain still recognises it as Ukrainian territory.

Russia said it fired warning shots and dropped bombs close to the ship, a claim disputed by Downing Street.

General Sir Nick Carter, the chief of the defence staff, later warned that any misstep in such a standoff could lead to all-out war, describing the risk of an "unwarranted escalation" as "the thing that keeps me awake at night".

Russia also said at the weekend it was monitoring the American missile destroyer USS Ross, which entered the Black Sea on Saturday.

[https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/27/belarus-dictator-floods-eu-migrants-retaliation-sanctions/?li\\_source=LI&li\\_medium=liftigniter-rhr](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/27/belarus-dictator-floods-eu-migrants-retaliation-sanctions/?li_source=LI&li_medium=liftigniter-rhr)

Belarus dictator floods EU with migrants in retaliation for sanctions

Four flights from Baghdad land in Minsk airport every week, and some of the planes carry as many as 600 passengers each

By [Nataliya Vasilyeva](#), RUSSIA CORRESPONDENT, MOSCOW  
27 June 2021 • 7:00am





Lithuanian border guards have intercepted a wave of asylum seekers arriving from the Belarusian border | CREDIT: Getty

The embattled Belarusian dictator has made good on his threat to flood the European Union with migrants by sending hundreds of Iraqis on 'package holidays' to neighbouring Lithuania in retaliation for sanctions.

Lithuania, an EU nation which shares a 700-kilometre border with Belarus, felt the pain days after Alexander Lukashenko issued the threat in late May.

Local border guards, who used to catch a few dozen trespassers a year, started to stumble upon groups of several dozen people every day, who would surrender and say they were looking for refuge in the European Union.

Lithuania this year received over 507 migrants, mostly Iraqi men, from Belarus, six times higher than last year's number. Most of them arrived over the last three weeks.

"We see that this flow of migrants is regulated by Belarusian authorities as a tool of political pressure, a means of hostile hybrid warfare," Mantas Adomenas, Lithuania's deputy foreign minister, told the Sunday Telegraph.

"We're dealing with a dictator who is increasingly on the edge of madness and is prepared to do absolutely unspeakable and unpredictable things."

Mr Lukashenko was [re-elected last year in a rigged vote](#) that triggered months of [unprecedented protests](#) in the former Soviet country.

His crackdown on the opposition reached a new low at the end of May when Belarusian authorities forced a [Ryanair flight to land in Minsk](#), arresting a dissident journalist who was on board.

Europe responded with [tough sanctions](#), including banning Belarusian flights from EU airspace. Mr Lukashenko said he would have his revenge.

"We used to catch migrants in droves here," he told parliament last month. "Now, forget about it. You'll be catching them yourself."



Lithuanian foreign minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said the Belarusian leader is using migration as a weapon against the European Union | CREDIT: Getty

Lithuanian border guards have been detaining groups of asylum seekers, mostly from Iraq and Afghanistan, every day since then.

Authorities in Lithuania had to pitch dozens of heated tents in a makeshift migrant processing centre to accommodate the asylum seekers and are now considering building a wall with Belarus which will cost about €15 million.

Ingrida Simonyte, the Lithuanian prime minister, has publicly accused the Belarusian government of orchestrating what her country views as a migrant crisis.

“It’s not just an episode of illegal immigration like we see on the other borders of the European Union,” the prime minister told reporters on a trip to the sparsely populated border area with Belarus.

Four flights from Baghdad land in Minsk airport every week, and some of the planes carry as many as 600 passengers each.

There is no explanation why the capital of the former Soviet republic suddenly became such a tourist magnet for the insurgency-ravaged country.

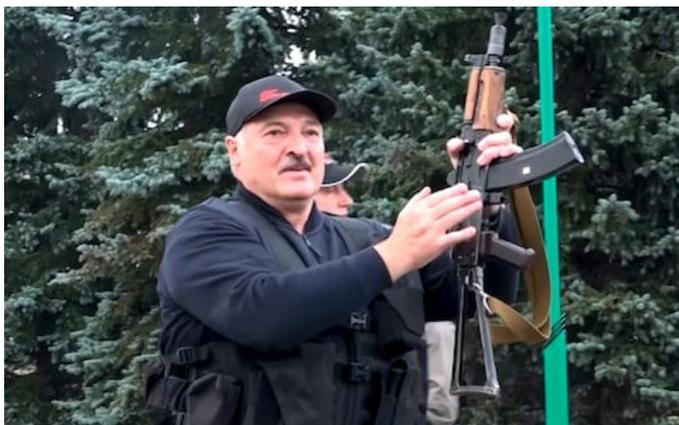
A top Belarusian lawmaker was at the city airport in May to welcome the maiden flight by Fly Baghdad, telling state TV that most of the passengers were tourists “who are coming here to learn about our culture and civilisation.”

Belarusian journalists who went to the airport earlier this week saw that passengers from the Baghdad flight were mostly men who were greeted by minders and boarded in groups on two large buses into town.

Belarusian media claimed state-owned travel agency Tsentrkurot is providing package tours for asylum seekers from Iraq.

Arnoldas Abromavicius, Lithuania’s deputy interior minister, told the Telegraph that his country’s intelligence has “reports, lots of indirect evidence and some documents” showing that the Belarusian authorities are “involved in facilitating the passage from Baghdad to Minsk” through Tsentrkurot.

The company did not reply to requests for comment.



'We used to catch migrants in droves here,' embattled Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko told parliament last month. 'Now, forget about it. You'll be catching them yourself.' | CREDIT: AP

Some of the asylum seekers caught at the border had their Belarusian visas dated that same day, leading the Lithuanians to think that the visas could have been issued on the plane before being dropped at the Lithuanian border.

Lithuanian authorities who have interviewed the migrants say that they paid unnamed individuals in their home countries between \$2,000 and \$4,000 for a “package trip” from Baghdad to the EU border.

Belarusian border guards have for weeks ignored desperate pleas and questions from their counterparts. Some of them told the Lithuanians of the asylum seekers: “Maybe those people fell from the sky,” Mr Abromavicius said.

As the Lithuanian interior minister was talking to the Telegraph on the phone, he was told a group of 42 people had been spotted near the border.

“Let’s imagine how difficult it would be to cross (into Lithuania) unnoticed by the Belarusian side.”

Belarusian border guards deny the claims, saying that they comply with “all the regulations and agreements with the border

guard agencies of the neighbouring states.”

Rights activists who work with refugees in Belarus describe the sudden surge in asylum seekers from the Middle East as unprecedented and point to the hallmarks of an organised effort.

“It appears that someone in Belarus is promoting this as the route to Europe,” Alyona Chekhovich, a lawyer at Belarusian NGO Human Constanta that provides legal help to foreign nationals in Belarus, told the Telegraph.

“We have never seen a flow quite like this before.”

While Lithuanian authorities have now launched talks with Iraq about a possible re-admission agreement and hope to dissuade the asylum seekers, who they say were duped by the regime, from traveling to Lithuania, Ms Chekhovich does not see how the EU can discourage people from flocking to Belarus

“It’s going to be hard to dissuade people from coming here,” she said.

The Belarusian dictator, who has ruled the country since 1994, has hinted at weaponising desperate asylum seekers and dropping them on the EU’s doorstep.

“They’re urging us to protect them against smugglers, drugs,” Mr Lukashenko said of the EU in an emotional speech at a Second World War anniversary event in western Belarus on Tuesday.

“I can’t help but ask: have you gone crazy? You have unleashed a hybrid war on us and now you demand that we protect you as we did before?”

He also referred to “hundreds of millions of dollars” that Belarus has been spending to safeguard the EU border.

“He’s either lying or he’s badly informed about his own country’s international obligations,” Mr Adomenas, the deputy foreign minister, told the Telegraph, quoting an agreement on border control and re-admission of illegal migrants that Belarus signed with the EU exactly a year ago.

The surge of asylum seekers also seems to be curiously timed with EU discussions of sanctions against Belarus.

Lithuania did not see any illegal border crossings for several days before Monday, when the EU adopted its fourth package of sanctions against the regime, said Mr Adomenas, the deputy foreign minister. “After that, they’ve been getting 50 people a day again, which is more than a half of what we used to see in the course of a whole year,” he said.

“We know that Lukashenko will send in more refugees if he decides to punish Lithuania further.”

[https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/06/24/gas-prices-rise-amid-russia-supply-squeeze/?li\\_source=LI&li\\_medium=liftigniter-rhr](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2021/06/24/gas-prices-rise-amid-russia-supply-squeeze/?li_source=LI&li_medium=liftigniter-rhr)

Gas prices rise amid Russia supply squeeze  
Exports from Gazprom have fallen by a fifth, according to reports

By Rachel Millard  
24 June 2021 • 5:06pm





Russia supplies about 40pc of Europe's gas | CREDIT: Sergei Bobylev/TASS

Gas prices in Europe have hit a 13-year high as Russian supply to the market is tightened.

UK and European gas contracts have risen above €30 per megawatt hour for the first time since 2008, driving up prices for businesses and consumers.

It comes as exports to Europe from Russia's Gazprom have dropped by about a fifth compared to before the pandemic, according to the *Financial Times*, even as demand has rebounded. About 40pc of Europe's gas supplies come from Russia.

The squeeze has also been driven by cold weather, low stocks and the replacement of coal with natural gas for power generation.

Energy experts told the *Financial Times* that Gazprom was meeting its contractual obligations, but was reluctant to add supplies through short-term measures such as spot market sales.

It comes as Russia tries to finish its [controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline](#) under the Baltic Sea between Russia and Germany, with financial backing from European companies including Shell and Wintershall Dea.

Many politicians in Europe and the US oppose the project amid concerns it is cutting out Ukraine and increases Europe's reliance on Russia for energy.

Russian news agency TASS said this month there were just 62 miles of the pipeline left to build. The Biden administration has waived sanctions on the project in an effort to repair relations with Germany.

The UK does not have a direct gas pipeline to Russia but imports from Europe, which in turn imports from Russia.

Most of the UK's gas comes from the North Sea and Norway. It also imports shipments of gas from [Russia via cargoes of liquified natural gas](#).

Gangster

Gazprom said it was "delivering gas strictly in accordance with the customers' requests," adding: "The basis of our business in Europe is long-term contracts. We have always followed and continue to adhere to this approach. We strictly fulfill the requests of our clients."

Meanwhile, US natural gas futures hit their highest level in two years on Thursday.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/24/poland-baltics-hit-merkel-macron-push-talks-putin/>

## Poland and Baltics block Merkel and Macron's push for talks with Putin

French and German support for dialogue with the Russian president met fierce resistance at Brussels summit

By **James Crisp**, EUROPE EDITOR

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Angela Merkel wants to reopen dialogue with the Kremlin | CREDIT: GETTY IMAGES

France and Germany's call for European Union summit talks with [Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) were blocked on Thursday night after fierce opposition from Poland and the Baltic countries.

At a European Council meeting, EU leaders considered overhauling their foreign policy towards Moscow, a week after US President Joe Biden met Mr Putin in Geneva.

Member states, especially those which border Russia, had been infuriated after Paris and Berlin blindsided them with a last minute proposal on Wednesday.

Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron had sought to resume EU-Russia talks, which were frozen after Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, but their plan was thwarted on Thursday.

"It was not possible to agree today that we should meet immediately at the top level," Ms Merkel said after the failed talks in Brussels.

Ms Merkel said that leaders had agreed to maintain and develop a "dialogue format" with Russia.

"I would have liked to see a bolder step here, but it is also good this way and we will continue to work on it," she said.

Lithuania's President Gitanas Nauseda said "there will be no meetings at the European Union leaders' level with Russia" and told reporters in Brussels the idea was like "trying to engage the bear to keep a pot of honey safe".

"We see that the situation of our relations with Russia is deteriorating and we see new aggressive forms in behaviour of Russia," he said.

Earlier on Thursday, Dmytro Kuleba, the foreign minister of non-EU member Ukraine, said the German-French push was a "dangerous deviation" from the EU's sanctions policy against Moscow.

"We need a dialogue to defend our interests," Mr Macron, the French president, said as he arrived in the Belgian capital.



Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said summit talks with Russia should only be held if Moscow abandoned aggressive policies. | CREDIT: Valeria Mongelli /Bloomberg

Berlin has economic interests in Russia and in the joint Nord Stream II gas pipeline which is being built from Russia to Germany.

A Kremlin spokesman said Mr Putin was a "supporter" of having the first EU-Russia summit since January 2014.

Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki accused Russia of launching cyber-attacks against his country. Nato has repeatedly warned that Russia is trying to divide Western democracies with disinformation

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"Starting any direct dialogue on the highest political level is only possible in a situation where there's an actual de-escalation and actual withdrawal from the aggressive politics," Mr Morawiecki said.

"The Kremlin understands power politics, the Kremlin does not understand free concessions as a sign of strength," Latvian Prime minister Krisjanis Karins said at the summit.

"What our intelligence tells us is that sanctions work and the European Union has to be more patient," said Estonia's Kaja Kallas, who asked what had changed in Russia's behaviour to deserve the olive branch.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said he was not against the presidents of European Commission and Council meeting with Mr Putin.

He said he would not meet the Russian leader because of Moscow's failure to cooperate on the investigation into the shooting down of Malaysian airliner MH17, which was carrying hundreds of Dutch passengers.

EU leaders are set to ask the European Commission to prepare options for economic sanctions against Russia.

The bloc [already imposed sanctions](#) against Russian energy, financial and arms sectors after the annexation of Crimea.

The EU has also hit individual Russian officials with asset freezes and travel bans over [the poisoning and jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny](#).

<https://www.rt.com/russia/527655-delta-covid19-vaccine-reluctance/>

## RT NEWS

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Hammered by infectious new Delta variant, Russia is now finding it has to get deadly serious

about Covid-19 vaccine reluctance

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A woman fills in a form before receiving a dose of with Russian Gam-COVID-VAK (trademark "Sputnik V") coronavirus vaccine at a vaccination point at a Globus hypermarket, in Moscow, Russia. © Sputnik / Vladimir Pesnya

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By Gabriel Gavin, in Moscow

An infectious virus is sweeping across Europe, with businesses shutting down and hospitals filling up. That might sound like an account of last year but now, for Russia at least, there is a real risk of history repeating itself.

For months, the country had seen the official tally of Covid-19 cases decline from its all-time peak in December and plateau at around 7,000 a day. Bars, shops, restaurants, food halls and even night clubs reopened in much of the country, while the rest of Europe was bouncing in and out of lockdowns. Russia, it seemed, was bucking the trend.

Now, though, that period of relative stability has come to an abrupt end. In the first week of June, the number of positive cases began to tick up, barely noticeably at first, but soon, with the kind of explosive exponential growth that scientists have become grimly used to seeing during the pandemic. Now, the official numbers [stand](#) at around 20,000 each day and still counting.

The pace at which the virus gained ground has caught the authorities by surprise. Sergey Sobyenin, the mayor of Moscow, which has once again quickly become the country's coronavirus hotspot, said that the situation is "*rapidly deteriorating*," and that the sudden rise in cases was "*quite unexpected*" given previously estimated levels of immunity in the population.

[ALSO ON RT.COM](#) [By shutting out travelers immunized with Sputnik V, the EU is helping undermine Russia's vaccine drive by feeding domestic doubts](#)

Health authorities in the Russian capital are advising even those who have been sick with Covid-19 in the past not to rely on still having protection against re-infection. According to a new directive from city officials, there is no "*way to assess how well antibodies will work against mutating strains of the virus.*" They have since relaxed rules that suggested those who had antibodies did not need to be vaccinated, encouraging the public to come in for doses anyway.

The idea that health workers are dealing with a new problem – or a new variant of an older problem – appears to be backed up by the evidence. Earlier this week, Sobyenin revealed that around 90% of cases in his city are estimated to have been caused by the infectious new Delta variant, which is thought to have originated in India. While too little is still known about its mutations, and what effect they might have on human health, Delta is widely understood to be significantly more infectious than the original strain of the virus.

In India, tragic scenes of packed hospital corridors and seemingly never-ending funeral pyres dominated European coverage of the pandemic. Now, it is on the West's doorstep. Emboldened by its altered genetic structure, the virus is running rampant through unvaccinated populations in the US and elsewhere.

In the UK, one of the global leaders in viral strain sequencing, 98% of all studied cases [are](#) now Delta variant, with nearly one in three positive tests getting the full laboratory analysis. However, mass vaccination appears, so far, to be keeping the death rate down. In Russia, which only sequences around 1% of positive samples, the new form appears to be responsible for 99% of infections overall.

[ALSO ON RT.COM](#) [Nearly half of Russians now back mandatory Covid-19 vaccination & 61% of those yet to get jab now planning to do so, polls say](#)

As a result, the rapid growth in cases has given politicians real cause for concern. Denis Protsenko of the Kommunarka Hospital, one of Moscow's top treatment facilities, told journalists earlier this month that his wards had a record number of patients on ventilators and would run out of beds in a matter of weeks if nothing was done.

Since then, the city has introduced a range of tough new measures. Sobyenin has demanded that companies in sectors like hospitality, transport and leisure ensure 60% of their workers are immunized, or else they will face hefty fines.

Officials have confirmed that bosses can suspend employees without pay in order to meet the quotas. Similar rules, forcing staff to choose to get vaccinated or lose their paycheck, have now been copied elsewhere, including in Saint Petersburg, the country's second city.

From Monday, the Russian capital will also require residents to scan a QR code when entering bars, cafes, pubs, food courts and a number of other public spaces. Only those who have proof of vaccination or were officially recorded as a coronavirus case within the past six months will be eligible for unrestricted access, while others will have to supply a clean PCR test from within the previous three days. A number of tourist destinations such as Sochi and Krasnodar and resorts across the country are also now demanding clean tests and, ultimately, throwing internal travel into disarray.

[ALSO ON RT.COM](#) [Moscow businesses 'obliged' to suspend workers who refuse Covid-19 vaccines as drive to overcome job skepticism comes into force](#)

Vaccine hesitancy has long been the Achilles' heel of the country's pandemic response. While many of its measures appeared to have contained the spread of the virus, Russia has some of the highest levels of skepticism about jabs of anywhere in the world. Data from research firm Morning Consult, based on 75,000 weekly interviews with people across the globe, found Russians were more cautious

research firm Morning Consult, based on 70,000 weekly interviews with people across the globe, found Russians were more cautious about vaccines than anywhere else surveyed, with more than half of respondents unwilling or uncertain about getting the jab.

Whether the tough new measures will work and whether they can be enforced in the long-term remains to be seen. However, things could once again be taking a turn for the worse before many of the rules even come into force. On Friday, Ministry of Health official Daria Danilenko confirmed that the country's first case of the newly-evolved 'Delta Plus' variant had been detected.

The strain, which exhibits some major modifications compared to its earlier namesake, was characterized by British scientists this month and listed as a cause for concern by Indian officials shortly afterwards, in a move described as precautionary. While it is thought to have been circulating for some time, 41 cases have already been reported in the UK, and there have been widely-reported concerns that it could be more damaging to the respiratory system than its predecessors. However, other scientists have urged caution and said more research must be done before public health authorities react.

Russian health officials have backed these calls, with Danilenko saying that *"it is worth emphasizing that this sample is one from April, and that neither in May, nor in June, not a single one of this kind was found."* However, given the apparently low numbers of samples sequenced, it is hard to definitely rule out further cases.

Regardless of whether it is the Delta or 'Delta Plus' variant that has been spreading in Russia, it is clear that the country is now having to react quickly to an unprecedented new healthcare threat. Measures that have helped in the past no longer seem to work, and nobody relishes the prospect of more restrictions as a firebreak against infection.

Health officials appear to understand that beating the virus is only possible with mass-immunizations, and are now throwing everything at pushing people into signing up. The question is whether they can succeed before hospitals are overwhelmed.

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