

Russian Engagement of British Naval Vessel in Black Sea Preceded by Mysterious Incident



Fake AIS signal showed Hr.Ms. Evertsen about 1 nautical mile from the Sevastopol harbor before it turns around as if it were a freedom of navigation operation.

Source: Marinetraffic.com

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Before Russia engaged the British HMS Defender in the Black Sea on 23 June, another similar but less examined incident occurred. According to *Marineschepen.nl*, a privately run Dutch news source that reports on Dutch and global naval news, on 19 June both a British and a Dutch warship on exercises in the Black Sea were tracked one nautical mile off the Russian-occupied port of Sevastopol on the coast of

Crimea. However, at the same time, according to multiple surveillance sources, video shows that both NATO ships were docked in Odessa, Ukraine during the time of the supposed incursion. The article's author pointed out that the global ship identification system (AIS) is not immune to error, and there have been previously documented misreadings due to inclement weather or temporary GPS failure.

The article posits a few possible explanations: Was the false reading some sort of error in the AIS, were either of the NATO ships engaging in electronic warfare to harass the Russian navy on Crimea, or instigate a false reading to measure Russian response to a perceived provocation? Was Russia engaged in some form of electronic warfare to let NATO navies know that it can take over or override the AIS? Or was it the work of a non-governmental hacking enterprise? It is notable that Russia did not appear to scramble jets or its own naval vessels to shadow the supposed incursion of the Dutch and British warships as it did with the HMS Defender a few days later on 23 June. Nor has there been any Russian reporting on the 19 June false reading incident.

Regardless, the Black Sea is becoming a naval flashpoint between Russia and the West as Russia seeks to establish naval dominance, while Western navies emphasize freedom of navigation and support regional allies on the Black Sea like Ukraine and Georgia. Future incidents regarding the AIS, beyond planned military actions, could lead to misperception, distrust, and even possible naval confrontation.

“The ship identification system, AIS, showed a voyage of Hr.Ms. Evertsen and HMS Defender from Odessa to Sevastopol, the largest port in Crimea and in the hands of Russia. However, there was talk of a fake signal, as both ships stayed all night in Odessa.”

Source: “‘Nachtelijke freedom of navigation exercise’ Evertsen en Defender bij Sevastopol blijkt nep (‘Nightly freedom of navigation exercise’ Evertsen and Defender at Sevastopol turns out to be fake),” *Marineschepen.nl* (independent Dutch website devoted to naval ships and international naval news), 19 June, 2021. <https://marineschepen.nl/nieuws/Nachtelijk-bezoek-Evertsen-Defender-Sevastopol-blijkt-vals-190621.html>

The ship identification system, AIS, showed a voyage of Hr.Ms. Evertsen and HMS Defender from Odessa to Sevastopol, the largest port in Crimea and in the hands of Russia. However, there was talk of a fake signal, as both ships stayed all night in Odessa.

It thus briefly appeared that the Evertsen and Defender had sailed into the 12-mile zone of Crimea to make it clear to Russia that the Netherlands and Great Britain do not recognize the territorial claim. That story soon turned out to be false. A Navy spokesman reported that the Evertsen and Defender were still in Odessa and had not left the port that night. The AIS signal did not suggest a port visit to the Russian-annexed port city in Crimea.

The fake AIS signal showed Hr.Ms. Evertsen about 1 nautical mile before the Sevastopol harbor heads turn around, as if it were a freedom of navigation operation. (Image: Marinetraffic.com) Sr.Ms. Evertsen had turned off AIS since the run-up to Istanbul. However, websites such as Marinetraffic.com showed two ‘ships’ leaving Odessa last night: the Evertsen and Defender. ‘Netherlands warship’ had the same MMSI registration as the original account. Now that doesn’t always mean something, naval ships regularly change accounts and data. For example, HMS Richmond and HMS Defender recently changed names.

As far as is known, AIS has never been misused before to report a false location of a Dutch naval vessel. The AIS of the Tromp seemed to be out of order earlier this year, but that was due to poor GPS reception in the dock in Den Helder.