



Arctic Sea Crew “Alive and Well”

The Russian-manned Finnish cargo ship Arctic Sea has been intercepted by the Russian navy 300 miles off Cape Verde, Times Online reported on August 17. Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov has told Russia’s President Medvedev: “The crew are all alive and well.”

“The crew have been transferred to our anti-submarine ship, the *Ladny*, where they are being questioned to clarify all the circumstances of the disappearance,” Serdyukov said. He also noted that the ship had not been under armed control when it was found, but he did not yet have any explanation for how the vessel came to be almost two weeks overdue and 2,500 miles off course. The *Arctic Sea* was scheduled to arrive in Algiers on August 4 with \$1.8 million worth of timber.



Serdyukov did offer some hope that answers will soon be forthcoming: “I think that in the next couple of hours we will be able to say in more detail what happened to them, why contact with them was lost, why [the ship] changed its course and all other details.”

Russia’s envoy to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, heightened the level of intrigue when he admitted to the news agency Itar-Tass that the media had been fed inaccurate information “which did not allow them to calculate the true actions of the Russian forces.” Rogozin said that cooperation with NATO forces had enabled the Russian navy to seize the ship and “save the crew.”

A BBC [article](#) for August 15 had deepened concern for the crew when it mentioned that a ransom demand had been made to the owners of the *Arctic Sea*, although the demand had not been confirmed as genuine. The BBC said that a Finnish radio station “had been told the 15 crew members’ lives would be at risk if it was not paid.”

Times Online supplied hints that there is more to the situation than meets the eye. The Portuguese navy was apparently the first to sight the *Arctic Sea* off Cape Verde. A source within the Portuguese navy described the situation at the time of the sighting as “very delicate and sensitive,” saying: “This is not a question of search and rescue, it is a political and police decision.”

The [Guardian](#) on August 17 gave a positive-sounding quote from Viktor Matveyev, the director of the freighter’s operating company, Solchart. Matveyev told the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper: “We are extremely pleased, we’ve been told everyone is alive and nobody was hurt.... I can’t say any more. I’m rushing to a meeting to organise getting the crew home, checking their health and providing any help. We still don’t know what condition the ship is in.”

AFP news service reported on August 18 that the Russian navy had arrested eight men suspected of



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hijacking the *Arctic Sea*. The report quoted [Russia's Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov](#), who said: "These people, claiming their boat had engine problems, boarded the *Arctic Sea* and, using the threat of arms, demanded that the crew follow all of their orders without condition."

Serdyukov said the Arctic Sea had been hijacked in Swedish territorial waters in the Baltic Sea. He added that the rescue operation was accomplished without a shot being fired.

"Eight people — not members of the crew — have been detained," [Serdyukov](#) said in remarks to President Dmitry Medvedev reported by Russian news agencies.

Photo: Anatoly Serdyukov



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