



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on August 14, 2009

## Missing Russian Cargo Ship Located

“A Russian-manned cargo ship that vanished last month in the Atlantic was found Friday [August 14] near Cape Verde off the coast of West Africa, according to French and Russian officials,” AP reported that same day. No information about the status of the ship’s crew or cargo was immediately available.



The *Arctic Sea*, a Maltese-flagged freighter with a 15-man Russian crew, sailed from Finland on June 23 and was scheduled to arrive in Algeria on August 4 with \$1.8 million worth of timber. The crew had reported that on June 24 while in Swedish waters about a dozen masked men boarded their ship, bound the crew, questioned them about carrying narcotics, beat them, and searched the vessel. After 12 hours, the attackers left in a high-speed inflatable boat.

“The alleged attack, unusual in itself, raised further concerns because it was not reported until the freighter had passed through Britain’s busy shipping lanes and was heading out into the wide Atlantic,” AP said. There is concern that some or all of the attackers may still be on board the *Arctic Sea*. Radio contact with the ship was maintained as it sailed along the French and Portuguese coasts, but all contact was lost afterward.

According to French Defense Ministry spokesman Captain Jerome Baroe, “Cape Verde coast guards said they have located the boat” about 520 miles off Cape Verde. France had joined with several other countries to search for the missing ship. Russian Ambassador to Cape Verde Alexander Karpushin told AP that Russian naval vessels, including a frigate, are expected to arrive in the area, though he did not specify when. It is also unclear whether the *Arctic Sea* had anchored or was continuing to sail south.

The European Commission has suggested that the cargo ship may have been boarded a second time. “Radio calls were apparently received from the ship, which had supposedly been under attack twice, the first time off the Swedish coast and then off the Portuguese coast,” commission spokesman Martin Selmayr said. The Portuguese Foreign Ministry, however, maintains that the ship never entered the territorial waters of Portugal.

Solchart Arkhangelsk, the operator of the *Arctic Sea*, said it had no information about a possible second attack. Officials from the company say that their attempts to contact the ship have gone unanswered. Solchart deputy director Ivan Boiko noted that the ship’s captain, 50-year-old Sergei Zaretsky, is a veteran sailor. The crew all hail from Arkhangelsk, a port city in Russia’s far northwest.

AP says that “speculation on what might have happened to the ship has ranged from suspicions that it was carrying secret cargo — possibly narcotics — to theories about a commercial dispute. Security experts have been wary of attributing its disappearance to bandits, noting that piracy is almost unheard



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of in European waters.”

Selmayr observed that the reported attacks on the *Arctic Sea* don't appear to be the work of typical pirates: “It would seem that these acts, such as they have been reported, have nothing in common with ‘traditional’ acts of piracy or armed robbery at sea.” At this point, it appears that at least some questions will be answered when the Russian navy catches up with the wandering freighter. The lives of the ship's crew are of greater concern than its cargo; hopefully they will all survive this ordeal.



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