



The Institute for Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia

Dark Waters

Exposing Russia's Shadow Fleet

FACES OF SANCTIONS

VIOLATIONS

IKAR'S EXCLUSIVE RELEASE

INTRODUCTION

“Shadow fleet” refers to a covert network of hundreds of aging oil tankers, often uninsured, under-regulated, and sailing under obscure flags. Its goal is to facilitate Russian crude oil export in defiance of Western sanctions. An estimated 600 to 1,000 tankers make up this fleet, putting 10-15% of the global oil tanker market in the gray zone.

Following the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, sanctions aimed to curb Russia’s oil revenue. Yet the shadow fleet helps Moscow evade price caps, earning an estimated \$15 billion annually. This covert trade funds the war, undermines sanctions, increases environmental risks, and disrupts global energy markets through hidden routes and pricing.

The Institute of Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia, using various methods of collecting and analyzing information regarding the maritime logistics and transportation, conducts a detailed and targeted investigation of the activities of the Russian shadow fleet. As a result of this research, we were able to identify and document important new facts that shed light not only on the structure, but also on the specific individuals involved in this network.

Captains Nikiforov and Kolesnikov – individuals directly linked to the logistics sustaining Russia’s war machine. This previously unreported information highlights the real actors enabling sanctions evasion and war profiteering behind the facade of anonymous tankers.



CAPTAIN IVAN OLEKSANDROVYCH NIKIFOROV



Date of birth	April 13, 1985
INN	231513740913
Passport RF	0305735378
Travel Passport	728527455 763609969
SNILS	19418873921
Military ID card	DD / 1130227
Mobile phone	+79182424014 +79897689328
email	vanyanik@yandex.ru
VK	https://vk.com/id432588490

Address of registration: Shoseina Street, 37, Natukhaevskaya village, Novorossiysk urban district, Krasnodar крпшцт, Russian Federation, 353982



(Photo of Nikifirov's house)

RELATIVES

- **Mother:** NIKIFOROVA VALENTINA ANDREEVNA
Date of birth: 1954-08-12
- **Father:** NIKIFOROV ALEKSANDR IVANOVYCH
Date of birth: 1954-10-15

DRIVER'S LICENSE

- Series / Number: 068514 / 23HK
Date of issue: 2011-08-11
- Series / Number: 598335 / 2311
Date of issue: 2013-08-27

CAREER

Captain Ivan Nikiforov is no ordinary sailor. A graduate of the Ushakov Maritime Academy and a seasoned mariner with years of service aboard various vessels, including sanctioned tankers. Nikiforov has emerged as a significant player in Russia's illicit war logistics. Since 2010, he has worked with "Sovcomflot", a state-affiliated shipping giant sanctioned for its role in enabling the invasion of Ukraine. But Nikiforov's role goes beyond routine navigation. He is an active participant in Kremlin-backed schemes that facilitate illegal oil exports and international sanctions evasion.

Between February and March 2025 alone, Nikiforov earned over 3.4 million ₺ in captain's pay, officially declared. That's nearly three times the monthly earnings of a U.S. tanker captain, who averages around 600,000 ₺ (\$7,200). These figures expose not only the lucrative nature of shadow fleet operations but also the financial incentives for professionals willing to trade legality for loyalty to a war economy.

- **09.2002-02.2008** – Cadet, Admiral F.F. Ushakov Maritime State Academy, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar region
- **05.2008-03.2014** – Chief Officer, International Shipping (contract-based), Novorossiysk, Krasnodar region
- **10.2010-Present** – Watch Officer, SCF Management Services, 28 Kunikova Str., Novorossiysk, Krasnodar region
- **01.2024-05.2024** – Captain, Oil Tanker NS Champion (IMO 9299719), LLC "InvestFlot", Saint Petersburg
- **05.2024-Present** – Captain, Oil Tanker Kotlas (IMO 9299719)

ASSIGNMENTS (2022-23)

Captains are legal agents of the vessel and bear responsibility for ensuring compliance with international maritime regulations. Unlike ordinary crew members, a captain holds command responsibility and is directly involved in operational decision-making.

Multiple assignments on blacklisted ships, particularly those involved in transporting prohibited cargo reveal active participation in sanctions evasion, suggesting the captain was fully aware of, and involved in, the illegal trade.

DATE	TRIP TYPE		BORDER CHECKPOINT	DESTINATION / DEPARTURE	SHIP/FLIGHT
2023-08-19	arrival	sea	Ust-Luga	Egypt, Suez	ns champion-Liberia
2023-06-14	departure	sea	Ust-Luga	India, Vadinar	ns champion-Liberia
2023-06-11	arrival	sea	Primorsk	Egypt, Suez	ns champion-Liberia
2023-04-14	departure	sea	Ust-Luga	India, Vadinar	ns champion-Liberia
2023-04-10	arrival	sea	Ust-Luga	Egypt, Suez	ns champion-Liberia
2023-03-19	departure	air	Sochi	Turkey, Istanbul	FV6731
2022-10-28	arrival	sea	Ust-Luga	Egypt, Suez	ns commander-Liberia
2022-08-11	departure	sea	Ust-Luga	India, Paradip	ns commander-Liberia



VESSELS

- KOTLAS (OTLA)



IMO number	9299719
MMSI	636012384
Former names	NS COMMANDER, NS CHAMPION, NUNA
Vessel type	Crude oil tanker
Operating status	Active
Flag	Comoro Islands
Former flags	Liberia, Russia
Year of build	2005
Owner	"Invest Fleet" Ltd (6460140 / Russian Federation / 30.01.2024)
Sanctions	USA , EU , Switzerland

PROPERTY

REAL ESTATE

- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0118056:925
Area: 750
Address: Novorossiysk, 8th Shchel district, Rodnichok village, plot 23
- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0305025:765
Area: 16.3
Address: Novorossiysk city, Engels St., 95, Lot №71
- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0118018:5905
Area: 461
Address: Novorossiysk, Myskhako village
- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0308001:1125
Area: 3
Address: Novorossiysk, st. Malozemelskaya, 14-a, 2
- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0308001:1700
Area: 19.8
Address: Novorossiysk, Malozemelskaya St., 14-d, Lot 76
- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0305025:100
Area: 3184
Address: Novorossiysk, Engels Str., plot 95
- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0118001:150
Area: 13154
Address: Novorossiysk, Myskhako village

CARS

- **VIN code:** XW8ZZZ5NZKG234539
License plate: M888MT23
Model: Volkswagen TIGUAN
- **VIN code:** W0LPE6DJ9BG063998
License plate: T319XK123
Model: OPEL ASTRA

CAPTAIN ALEKSANDR VLADIMIROVICH KOLESNIKOV



Date of birth April 23, 1985
INN 231517207079
Passport RF 0305909883
Travel Passport 764370872
SNILS 13790391581
Mobile phone +79189852722
email alexander230485@mail.ru
front.ardenne.tanker@mail.ru
VK <https://vk.com/id62335141>

Address: Krasnodar region, Novorossiysk, Karamzin Str., 20, apartment 40, 353910



(Photo of Kolesnikov's house)

RELATIVES

- **Wife:** KOLESNIKOVA ANASTASIA SERGEEVNA
Date of birth 1984-06-30
- **Mother:** KOLESNIKOVA TATIANA GEORGIEVNA
Date of birth 1955-04-29
- **Father:** KOLESNIKOV VLADIMIR PETROVICH
Date of birth 1953-02-12
- **Daughter:** KOLESNIKOVA MARGARITA ALEKSANDROVNA
Date of birth 2007-01-05

DRIVER'S LICENSE

- Series / Number: 23HK /067842
Date of issue: 2011-07-27
- Series / Number: 2311 /598850
Date of issue: 2013-10-04

CAREER

Unlike Captain Ivan Nikiforov, Aleksandr Kolesnikov operates with greater discretion, conducting business through international contracts that remain absent from official state registers and public declarations. A graduate of the State Maritime Academy in Novorossiysk, Kolesnikov rose through the ranks by serving for years as a captain's assistant. Despite his low-profile approach, he is actively involved in Kremlin-backed operations that support illicit oil exports and help circumvent international sanctions.

- KRASNODARSK REGION, NOVOROSSIYSK
CADEANT, MARITIME STATE ACADEMY
09.2002-02.2008
- KRASNODARSK REGION, NOVOROSSIYSK
2ND ASSISTANT CAPTAIN ON INTERNATIONAL VESSELS UNDER CONTRACT
04.2008-08.2011

ASSIGNMENTS (2022-23)

Captains are legal agents of their vessels, accountable for ensuring compliance with maritime regulations and making key operational decisions. A pattern of frequent international deployments, often involving air travel to board foreign-flagged ships engaged in illicit activity, strongly indicates a captain's informed and deliberate role in sanctions evasion networks.

DATE	TRIP TYPE		BORDER CHECKPOINT	DESTINATION / DEPARTURE	FLIGHT
2023-05-27	arrival	air	Sochi	Turkey, Istanbul	A4-772
2022-12-21	departure	air	Sochi	Turkey, Istanbul	FV6731
2022-08-15	arrival	air	Mineral Waters	UAE, Dubai	684
2022-03-26	departure	air	Moscow (Vnukovo)	Turkey, Istanbul	TK-420
2021-12-03	arrival	air	Moscow (Vnukovo)	Turkey, Istanbul	TK-419



VESSELS

- ZANGAZUR



IMO number	9420617
MMSI	423530100
Former names	SILVER, ZARIFA ALIYEVA, SHAH DENIZ
Vessel type	Crude oil tanker
Operating status	Active, Commissioned
Flag	Azerbaijan
Former flags	Malta, Panama
Year of build	2010
Owner	SA ZANGAZUR SHIPHOLDINGS

PROPERTY

REAL ESTATE

- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0111002:3079
Area: 108.1
Address: Novorossiysk, Tsemdolina district, Solnechnaya Str., 2-3, apt. 74
- **Cadastral number:** 23:47:0111002:1634
Area: 55417
Address: Novorossiysk, Tsemdolina district, Solnechnaya Str., plot 2



(Tsemdolina district)

ORGANIZATIONS

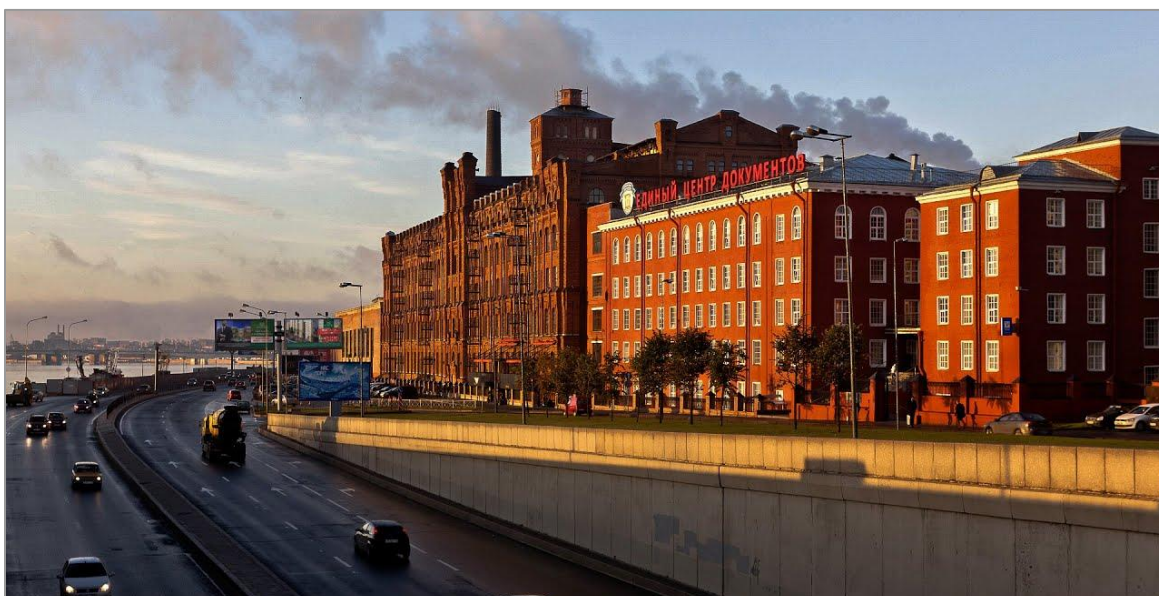
Investigating the profiles of Captain Nikiforov and Captain Kolesnikov revealed ties to several organizations directly linked to shadow fleet operations. These connections expose their involvement in recruiting crew members, manipulating international law, setting up shell companies, and engaging in other questionable activities that facilitate illicit maritime trade.

- **LLC "INVEST FLOT"** (direct employer of Nikiforov)

Date of registration	2023-12-15
OGRN	1237800143569
KVED	50.20, "MARINE CARGO TRANSPORT ACTIVITIES"
KPP	780501001
INN	7805812079
Sanctions	EU (2025-02-24), Switzerland (2025-03-04)
Address	St. Petersburg, Vasi Alekseeva Str., 14 A/7-N, room 18, 198188

"Invest Flot" is operated by SKF "Arktika", a subsidiary of the "Sovcomflot" Group. As part of this state-linked network, it manages a fleet of tankers that transport crude oil and petroleum products by sea, playing a key role in export operations, including those tied to sanctioned trade routes. "Invest Flot" owns:

- "Novoshipinvest" (INN 2315116130), Novorossiysk
- JSC "Seaport of Sochi" (INN 2320072713), Sochi



-
- **LLC "AST"** (possible recruiting agency; closed/moved to another jurisdiction)

Representative office in Norway: "AIRSEA TOUR", <https://airsea.no/>

Date of registration	2014-03-11
OGRN	1143926008225
KVED	52.29, "AUXILIARY OTHER, RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION"
KPP	390601001
INN	3906318976
Address	Kaliningrad, Solnechnogorskaya St. 31/1
Website	https://ast-travel.ru/

"AST" has numerous representative offices in the Russian Federation, including St. Petersburg, Murmansk, and Kirovsk, as well as in Europe.

The company has signs of fictitiousness (or shadow activity) there are facts of re-registration. The current status of the legal entity is unknown. In addition, as in the case of <https://airsea.no/>, most of the functional elements of the site <https://ast-travel.ru/> are just a dummy (links are not clickable or lead to non-existent pages).

- **"AEROTRANS SERVICE OÜ" (TALLINN, ESTONIA) and "POSEIDON GROUP", (MOSCOW, RF)**

At first glance, these appear to be respectable companies with established business histories. However, both "Aerotrans Service" OÜ and "POSEIDON Group" show signs of involvement in shadow fleet logistics, particularly in crew recruitment and operational support. This assumption requires careful verification by the authorized bodies. However, it is already confirmed by numerous contacts of representatives of these structures with individuals directly related to the activities of the shadow fleet, which indicates the possible participation of these companies in schemes that go beyond the boundaries of legal maritime services.

<https://aerotrans-service.eu>

<https://poseidongroup.ru>

CONCLUSION

Organizations involved in shadow fleet management, such as shipping companies, vessel crews, and customs authorities, bear significant responsibility for their role in facilitating illicit activities.

When such companies knowingly use unregistered or reflagged vessels to transport sanctioned cargo, they breach not only shipping regulations but also international trade laws. Similarly, captains and crew members, who are often complicit in falsifying documentation, misrepresenting cargo, or manipulating navigation systems, are directly involved in the illegal operations. Their actions make the ships viable instruments for evading sanctions.

In addition to shipping companies, vessel crews, and customs authorities, fake or inauthentic legal bodies, such as offshore shell companies and reflagged vessels, play a crucial role in facilitating illicit activities. These organizations use deceptive tactics like falsifying corporate documentation, creating false flags, and establishing offshore financial networks to obscure ownership and evade international regulations.

By exploiting jurisdictional gaps and legal loopholes, they enable the shadow fleet to operate under the radar, further complicating enforcement efforts. These tactics, combined with the direct involvement of captains and crew in misrepresenting cargo and manipulating systems, make it difficult to trace the illicit flow of sanctioned goods, allowing these operations to thrive.

Given the above, it is important to expose the direct participants of sanctions violations, as these people are knowingly involved in schemes that directly finance Russia's illegal and aggressive war against Ukraine and its preparations for military aggression against other European countries. Such investigations and subsequent personal responsibility for these individuals should demonstrate that helping to finance Russian military aggression will inevitably have its consequences. Another key point is the exposure of the infrastructure for sanctions violations directly on the territory of EU countries and the facilitation of equally serious consequences for those individuals who provide it while physically present on their territory.

The Institute for Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia continues its systematic work to identify individuals and legal entities who bear a large share of responsibility for the Russian Federation's ability to continue to commit war crimes and prepare to commit new ones.



The Institute for Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia

MAY 2025