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Could a friendly beluga whale be a spy? – 3rd May, 2019

Level 4

A professor said a beluga whale found in the Arctic Ocean near Norway's northernmost point could be a Russian spy. Locals said the beluga was very tame and enjoyed being touched. The professor said the whale had a harness for a spy camera that was "most likely" from the Russian Navy. However, images show "Equipment of St. Petersburg" written on the harness in English. A local said: "It could have swum from St. Petersburg, Florida."

There is online speculation about the whale. The US Navy uses dolphins so it could have come from Florida. A Russian naval analyst downplayed links to the Russian military. He said: "Even if there are military programs for using marine animals for navy purposes, they are unlikely to be belugas." Another Russian military said: "If we were using this animal for spying, do you really think we'd attach a mobile phone number with [a] message?"

Level 5

A professor in Norway said a beluga whale found in the Arctic Ocean near Norway's northernmost point could be a Russian spy. Local residents report that the beluga was very tame and enjoyed being stroked. The professor said the whale had a harness and mount for a spy camera. He said: "It is most likely that the Russian Navy...was involved." However, images show there is "Equipment of St. Petersburg" written on the harness in English. A local said: "It could have escaped from a Russian military facility or...swum from St. Petersburg, Florida, because of the English-language text."

There is speculation online about the whale. Journalists say it could have come from a whale-training facility in St. Petersburg, Florida. The US uses dolphins to help navy divers. A Russian naval analyst downplayed links the beluga might have with the Russian military. He said: "Even if there are military programs for using marine animals for navy purposes, they are unlikely to be belugas." A Russian military official told the BBC: "If we were using this animal for spying, do you really think we'd attach a mobile phone number with the message 'please call this number?'"

Level 6

A professor at a university in Norway believes a beluga whale that was found in the Arctic Ocean near Norway's northernmost point could be part of Russia's spy network. Local residents reported that the beluga was extremely tame and enjoyed being petted. Professor Audun Rikardsen said the creature was fitted with a harness and mount for a spy camera. He said: "It is most likely that the Russian Navy in Murmansk was involved." However, news images show there is "Equipment of St. Petersburg" written on the harness in English. A local said: "The talk in this hamlet is that it could have escaped from a Russian military facility or could have swum from St. Petersburg, Florida, because of the English-language text."

There is much speculation online as to where the whale came from. Journalists are asking whether it came from whale and dolphin training facilities in St. Petersburg, Florida. The U.S. Navy is known to use dolphins to help divers on military missions. A Russian naval analyst, Mikhail Barabanov, downplayed any links the beluga might have with the Russian military. He said: "Even if there are military programs for using marine animals for navy purposes, they are unlikely to be belugas." A Russian military official agreed. He told the BBC: "If we were using this animal for spying, do you really think we'd attach a mobile phone number with the message 'please call this number?'"