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Attack on Russian fleet leads to collapse of deal ensuring vital grain shipments

A swarm of Ukrainian air and naval drones carried out a massive attack Saturday on the Russian Black Sea Fleet docked at Sevastopol in Crimea, provoking the breakdown of a grain shipment agreement and threatening hunger for millions of people around the world. Russia claimed that at least one of the drones was launched from the security zone guaranteed by the grain corridor.



Russian Black Sea fleet ships are anchored in one of the bays of Sevastopol, Crimea, March 31, 2014. (AP Photo, File) [AP Photo]

The Russian foreign ministry said the strikes were “directed, among other things, against Russian ships that ensure the functioning of the specified humanitarian corridor.” Following the attack, the ministry claimed that “the Russian side cannot guarantee the safety of civilian dry cargo ships participating in the ‘Black Sea Initiative.’”

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The Black Sea Grain Initiative was an agreement between Russia and Ukraine, brokered by Turkey in July, that allowed the transportation of 9.5 million tons of food products out of Ukraine and onto global markets, against the backdrop of an unprecedented surge in food prices.

Like the bombing of the Kerch Bridge and the assassination of Russian fascist ideologue Daria Dugina, the announcement of the Ukrainian attack followed a similar pattern. The *New York Times* reported that Ukrainian forces carried out the attack, confirming the assertions of Russian officials.

The *Times*' confirmation came in the form of an [article](#) published Saturday, "With Western Weapons, Ukraine Is Turning the Tables in an Artillery War," which declared, "The new capabilities were on display in the predawn hours Saturday when Ukrainian drones hit a Russian vessel docked in the Black Sea Fleet's home port of Sevastopol, deep in the occupied territory of Crimea, once thought an impregnable bastion."

As with previous attacks, Ukrainian officials denied being involved, absurdly claiming Russia blew up its own ships. Other US reports treated the claims that Ukrainian forces were involved as unsubstantiated allegations by the Kremlin.

As with previous attacks on Russian forces in Crimea, both sides had an incentive to conceal the extent and impact of the Ukrainian attacks on Russian forces.

The *Guardian*, reviewing footage published by Ukrainian journalists, [claimed](#) that Russia's Black Sea flagship vessel, the Admiral Makarov, was damaged in the incident.

The *Guardian* [reported](#) that the "frigate was one of three Russian ships to have been hit on Saturday. A swarm of drones—some flying in the air, others skimming rapidly along the water—struck Russia's navy at 4.20 a.m."

The newspaper continued, "Ukrainian officials said it was unclear if the Admiral Makarov was badly crippled, or had escaped with light damage. Unconfirmed reports said its hull was breached and radar systems smashed."

The *Guardian* cited Ukrainian journalist Andriy Tsaplienko, who concluded, "There is a good chance that several ships are not just damaged but sunk."

The incident follows the sinking in April of the Moskva, then the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, which was the first time Russia had lost a flagship since 1905. It was the second-largest vessel to be sunk in war since 1945.

Global grain markets are expected to see a surge in food prices Monday when trading resumes following the suspension of the grain deal, with experts warning about "catastrophic consequences" for low-income countries.

“We’ll see a substantial spike in prices” as a result, Andrey Sizov, managing director of Black Sea grain consultancy SovEcon, told the *Financial Times*.

Arif Husain, chief economist at the UN World Food Program, told the FT that “dozens of countries” would be affected by the disruption of global grain supplies. “In the good times [this] would be bad,” he said, “but in the current state of the world, it’s something that needs to be resolved as soon as possible.”

Responding to the announcement by Russia, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared, “In suspending this arrangement, Russia is again weaponizing food in the war it started, directly impacting low- and middle-income countries and global food prices, and exacerbating already dire humanitarian crises and food insecurity.”

It was clear, however, that the main purpose of the Ukrainian attack was to blow up the deal, creating the pretext for intensified US/NATO military intervention.

Earlier this year, figures such as retired Admiral James Stavridis, the former NATO supreme allied commander Europe, called for the United States to carry out an attack on the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the name of establishing a “humanitarian corridor” for grain shipments. The announcement of the agreement between Russia and Ukraine to ship grain from the Black Sea had temporarily put a stop to these calls.

As if choreographed beforehand, the breakdown of the grain deal was immediately met with demands within the US political establishment for direct US naval intervention in the Black Sea, which would risk triggering a shooting war between Russian and US naval vessels.

“This may lead the international community to escort the grain shipments in defiance of Russian threats,” Stavridis wrote on Twitter Saturday.

In an editorial Sunday, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote, “The best response is for the U.S. to organize a coalition of the willing to escort grain shipments from Odessa and through the Black Sea. It needn’t be a NATO operation, though the U.S. would have to lead it.”

Last week, *Newsweek* carried an article headlined “Finland Will Allow NATO to Place Nuclear Weapons on Border With Russia,” which reported that Finnish defense officials gave a “commitment” to NATO that they would not seek “restrictions or national reservations” on the placement of NATO nuclear weapons in the country’s application to join NATO is accepted.

The collapse of the Black Sea grain agreement will have devastating consequences for the working people of the whole world, who are being made to pay the cost of the US-NATO effort to militarily encircle and defeat Russia.

The surging cost of food and fuel, however, are driving a global upsurge of the class struggle, which must be armed with a socialist perspective to oppose war.

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