



Summary

Russia on Saturday 29 October announced that it was suspending its participation in the Black Sea grain initiative, which was reached in late July, following what it termed a “massive” drone attack on its Black Sea Fleet in the Crimean port of Sevastopol. One warship was damaged in the attack on Saturday, with Russian officials blaming the incident on Ukraine. In the wake of the attack, Ukrainian officials have disclosed that a total of 218 vessels are “effectively blocked” due to the decision. Prior to Saturday’s attack, the United Nations was attempting to broker an extension of the agreement beyond the November end date.



Russia Suspends Participation in Grain Initiative

On Saturday 29 October, Russia announced that it would suspend its participation in the Black Sea grain deal for an “indefinite period” because it could not “guarantee safety of civilian ships” travelling under the pact after an attack on its Black Sea fleet. The suspension came shortly after the Russian Defence ministry said that Ukraine had attacked the Black Sea Fleet near Sevastopol with 16 drones earlier in the day. According to Russian officials, the air and maritime drones attacked civilian and Black Sea Fleet vessels in the Bay of Sevastopol in Crimea at 0420 Kyiv time on Saturday. Russia has reported that all nine of the air drones were destroyed, adding that four of the seven maritime drones were destroyed on the outer perimeter of the bay, while three more made it inside before they were destroyed. Russia further reported minor damage to the minesweeper Ivan Golubets. Unverified footage circulating on social media depicted what appeared to be maritime drones speeding across the water towards a Russian battleship while bullets were fired at the drone. Russia’s defence ministry disclosed that the attack was carried out by Ukraine’s 73rd Marine Special Operations Centre under the guidance and leadership of British navy specialists in the town of Ochakiv on the Black Sea Coast. It further stated that personnel from the same British navy unit, which it did not name, had blown up the Nord Stream pipelines last month. Britain has denied the claims, with a spokesperson for the defence ministry saying, “to detract from their disastrous handling of the illegal invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Ministry of Defence is resorting to peddling false claims of an epic scale,” adding, “this latest invented story says more about the arguments going on inside the Russian Government than it does about the West.” Russia has also said that after recovering the wreckage of some of the maritime drones, it had investigated the memory of the Canadian-made navigation modules installed on the drones. It noted that the maritime drones had been launched from the coast near Odesa and had moved along the grain corridor security zone before heading into the Bay of Sevastopol. The Russian defence ministry added that one of the maritime drones appeared to have started from within the security zone of the grain corridor itself, adding that “this may indicate the preliminary launch of this device from aboard one of the civilian vessels chartered by Kyiv or its Western patrols for the export of agricultural products from the seaports of Ukraine.” Ukraine has so far neither confirmed nor denied that it was



behind the attack, though the Ukrainian military has suggested that Russians themselves may have carried out the attack on itself so that it could suspend participation in the grain deal.

UN & Partners to Press Ahead

The UN, Turkey and Ukraine are pressing ahead to implement the Black Sea grain deal despite Russia suspending its participation in the pact. On 29 October, the UN reported that 9 vessels safely passed through three corridors of the Black Sea Grain initiative with more than 10 vessels both outbound and inbound waiting to enter the corridor. However on Sunday, no vessels moved through the established maritime humanitarian corridor, with the UN disclosing in a statement that it had agreed with Ukraine and Turkey on a movement plan for 16 vessels on Monday – 12 outbound and 4 inbound. It further disclosed that Russian officials at the JCC had been told about the plan, along with the intention to inspect 40 outbound vessels on Monday, and noted that “all participants coordinate with their respective military and other relevant authorities to ensure the safe passage of commercial vessels” under the deal.

Since the agreement was reached in July, more than 9.5 million tonnes of corn, wheat, sunflower products, barley, rapeseed and soy have been exported. However ahead of its 19 November expiry, Russia had said that there were serious problems with it, while Ukraine reported that Moscow had blocked almost 200 ships from picking up grain cargoes.

While the UN, Turkey and Ukraine disclosed on Sunday that they will carry on moving grain as per the July agreement, shipowners and insurers are likely to be extremely wary of the increased security threat in the region. On Monday, two cargo ships loaded with grain left Ukrainian ports and took the humanitarian maritime corridor to Turkey, despite Russia’s pull-out. There have been no further announcements pertaining to vessel movements in the coming days. Currently it remains unclear about the future of the Black Sea grain initiative, though Russia indicated on Sunday that it will have “contacts” with Turkey and the UN “soon” on the agreement, warning however that this would only occur once all circumstances surrounding “Ukraine’s attack” on its Black Sea fleet had been clarified and a UN Security Council meeting held.



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