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Russia Says Will View Ships En Route to Ukraine as Possible Military Carriers

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Bulker "Brave Commander" with a cargo of Ukrainian wheat leaves the sea port of Odesa in August 2022.
Nina Lyashonok / AP / TASS

Russia said Wednesday that it will now consider all vessels nearing Ukraine's ports to be potential carriers of military cargo from Thursday.

The announcement comes days after Moscow pulled out of a deal allowing wartime exports of Ukrainian grain that had eased a global food crisis sparked by Russia's invasion.

"From 00:00 a.m. Moscow time on July 20, 2023, all vessels on the Black Sea sailing to Ukrainian ports will be regarded as potential carriers of military cargo," the Defense Ministry said in a statement on its Telegram channel.

"The flag states of such vessels will be considered involved in the Ukrainian conflict on the side of the Kyiv regime," it added.

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Kyiv also accused Russia on Wednesday of deliberately striking its Black Sea deal grain facilities in Odesa and destroying tons of food.

"Russian terrorists deliberately targeted the grain deal infrastructure, and every Russian missile is a blow not only to Ukraine, but to everyone in the world who wants a normal and safe life," Zelensky said on social media.

Zelensky previously said ship owners had expressed readiness to continue supplying grain through the Black Sea corridor with Ukraine and Turkey's approval despite Russia's withdrawal from the deal.

Moscow withdrew from the grain deal earlier this week, citing obstacles to Russia's own grain and fertilizer exports and accusing Kyiv of using the Black Sea grain corridor for "combat purposes."

Russia also said Tuesday it would lift "safe navigation guarantees" for cargo ships in the Black Sea.

AFP contributed reporting.

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