

Russia's War Machine Fed by Free-Flowing Exports of Uzbek 'Guncotton' Pulp, Reports Say

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A worker collects cotton. **Valery Matytsin / TASS**

Much of Russia's war machine reportedly remains reliant on exports of cotton pulp, or cellulose, from two factories in Uzbekistan.

Cellulose is a key ingredient in nitrocellulose, or "guncotton," a highly flammable compound used as an explosive and as a propellant in artillery shells, rockets and missiles.

[Reporting](#) from U.S. public broadcaster PBS Newshour and an [article](#) from Talk Finance have focused on the Fergana Chemical Plant (Fargona Kimyo Zavodi) and Jizzakh Chemical Plant (Raw Materials Cellulose). The latter media outlet said the plants have supplied over \$170 million worth of cellulose to Russian arms makers since February 2022, when the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Fergana Chemical Plant and Jizzakh Chemical Plant were both owned by Tashkent-born

Russian national Rustam Muminov, though he transferred his shares in the Jizzakh factory to other parties last year.

U.S. sanctions do not apply to cotton pulp exports, though observers of Russia's war machine and war economy have several times raised the issue of whether Muminov should be personally sanctioned.

The two plants have supplied cellulose to Russian military contractors including the Kazan State Gunpowder Plant, Perm Gunpowder Plant and Tambov Gunpowder Plant, according to Talk Finance.

These entities were sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2023.

Uzbekistan's cotton, known as "white gold," has long been a highly important part of the country's economy, helping it through its post-Soviet economic challenges.

Geopolitical analysts note that while Uzbekistan has not backed Russia's war in Ukraine and forbids Uzbek nationals from serving as mercenary soldiers in the conflict, Tashkent in its foreign policy would not be prepared to significantly disrupt economic relations with Russia, which remains its second-largest trading partner, closely behind China. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Uzbekistan in May last year and secured a deal to build the country its first nuclear power plant.

Joh Herbst, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, said in an interview for the PBS report: "Uzbekistan does sit in one of the world's most difficult regions. It has China, Iran and Russia [as near neighbors]. So they have to be cautious. So the fact that the Uzbeks will make some arrangements with Moscow, or, for that matter, with Beijing, is something that we cannot [shakes head] — we have to understand. I think we just want to make sure that there are limits to that relationship."

However, Denys Hutyk, a representative of the Economic Security Council of Ukraine, told the broadcaster it was certainly the case that "using sanctions and targeting those two legal entities [the cellulose plants] and this individual [Muminov], this Russian citizen, can have an impact on the direct supply chains of the Russian defense industry."

Muminov, born in 1965, graduated from the Tashkent Automobile and Road Institute. He formerly directed the Turkish company Bursel Insaat, managing cotton processing and textile projects in Uzbekistan.

From 1997 to 2012, Muminov was involved in various industrial projects, including his role as deputy director for foreign economic relations at the Tashkent Aircraft Production Association (TAPOiCh).

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