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Ukraine Detains Cargo Ship Linked to Russia's 'Shadow Fleet' in Odesa Port

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Ukrainian security officials have detained a cargo vessel in the port of Odesa that authorities say is part of Russia's so-called "shadow fleet," the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said Wednesday.

The ship, whose name was not disclosed, arrived under the flag of an African country to load a shipment of steel pipes.

The captain and 16 crew members holding passports from unspecified Middle Eastern countries were on board at the time of the seizure.

According to the SBU, the vessel illegally transported nearly 7,000 tons of Russian grain from annexed Crimea to North Africa in January 2021.

The ship made "at least seven" calls at Sevastopol for the same purpose just before Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the agency said.

During a search, investigators found voyage plans, pilot charts and other documents that the SBU says offer evidence of the vessel's involvement in "illegal operations in ports on temporarily occupied Ukrainian territory."

Ukraine has opened a criminal case on charges including financing actions aimed at seizing state power or altering national borders, treason, transportation-related violations and unlawful entry into occupied territory.

The SBU said the ship's owner is under Ukrainian national security sanctions and routinely changed the vessel's name and nominal foreign beneficiaries in an effort to evade restrictions.

The seized vessel will be transferred to Ukraine's Asset Recovery and Management Agency (ARMA), which handles property linked to corruption and other criminal offenses.

Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office said the ship's captain has been formally notified of suspicion of illegal entry to and exit from temporarily occupied territory.

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