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Russia Steps Up Ship Protection in Black Sea as Attacks Threaten Grain Exports

By Reuters

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Grain shipment at the port of Novorossiysk. **Ivan Studenov (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Russia's Transportation Ministry said Monday that it was stepping up protection of ships in the Azov-Black Sea basin while also developing alternative cargo routes, in a move that follows a sharp escalation of attacks at sea by both sides in the war in Ukraine.

In response to what it called a "tense situation... stemming from hostile drone attacks on maritime vessels," the ministry formed a joint task force with Russia's Defense Ministry to reroute freight, protect commercial ships and shift cargo flows to alternative transit modes.

"A number of port operators have already expressed their readiness to handle additional cargo volumes and accelerate shipment rates at their terminals, within the limits of their operational capabilities," it said in a statement.

Russia, the world's largest wheat exporter, and Ukraine, also a major agricultural exporter,

have been attacking each other's agricultural export facilities and commercial vessels in the Black Sea area in recent weeks, driving wheat prices higher on global markets.

Russia’s main grain exporters union warned Friday that Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian ships and ports could shut down grain exports via the Black Sea in the near future, pushing up prices and causing hunger in Africa and the Middle East.

Ukraine's largest farming union has also warned in recent weeks that Russian strikes on shipping near the southern port of Odesa are restricting Ukrainian exports during the key harvest period and could affect global food supplies.

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