

I. Executive Summary

A Black Sea Stalingrad

Before Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine was a global agricultural powerhouse—exporting around 12% of the world's wheat and playing a vital role in the supply of food and fertilisers. The barbaric invasion shattered this stability, severely disrupting exports and exacerbating global food insecurity.

In July 2022, the Black Sea Grain Initiative ('BSGI') was launched by the UN, Turkey, Ukraine, and Russia to enable the safe passage of grain through Ukrainian ports. Despite this, Russia continued to obstruct exports through a de facto naval blockade and administrative barriers. One year later, in July 2023, Russia unilaterally withdrew from the BSGI and immediately began targeting Ukrainian grain infrastructure. Most of these attacks impacted storage facilities located within the Black Sea and the Danube ports essential to Ukraine's export activities, causing in many instances irreparable damage and injuries to civilians.

This report presents findings from a six-month investigation involving:

- The collection, analysis of information, including by cross-referencing official, mainstream, and social media sources;¹
- OSINT and imagery analysts further reviewed visual User-Generated Content ('UGC') collected for purposes of geolocation and, when possible, chronolocation, in parallel to the review of low, medium, and high-resolution satellite imagery;
- Weapons Ordnance Munitions and Explosives ('WOME') specialists reviewed satellite and other images and videos pertaining to damaged infrastructure to provide an assessment of the most likely cause of damage and weapons used;
- Specialist review of mobile device data including tens of millions of unique Russian selectors, cross-referenced against over 2,600 Russian military sites and more than 300 sites that have been identified as possible Shahed supply chain facilities or launch sites. This led to the discovery of several details related to a person of interest, including their full name, DOB, tax ID number, and phone number; and
- Analysis of thousands of records of Marine Tracking Data to identify ships present at Reni and Izmail ports at the time of the reported attacks.

The analysis conducted by the SMJT identified deliberate attacks by Russian forces on grain and related infrastructure across the Odesa Oblast, including the ports at Chornomorsk, Reni, and Izmail, an agricultural company, and the Orlivka border crossing, a ferry terminal primarily handling grain.

The team reviewed numerous high-level Russian state and Russian propaganda statements explicitly acknowledging the intent behind these attacks—aimed at crippling Ukraine’s agricultural economy, attacks which were described by Russia as “predictable” following the withdrawal from the BSGI.² On 21 July 2023, a Russian official state-sponsored propagandist stated that:

“[T]he war for them [the Black Sea ports] will be waged [...] without any mercy. [...] for the Western coalition, Odessa, Nikolaev and Izmail are a kind of Stalingrad. Without the Black Sea ports, Ukraine simply does not exist [...]”³

Notably, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Russia’s readiness to replace Ukrainian grain exports, underlining a broader campaign of economic warfare.⁴

Within the timeframe analysed by GRC (July – October 2023), Russian attacks on the ports of Chornomorsk, Reni, and Izmail resulted in the damage or destruction of grain and grain-related infrastructure. Russian forces further attacked the in-land agricultural company ‘Ivushka,’ east of the town of Pavlivka, Odesa Oblast and the Orlivka Border Crossing, a ferry terminal primarily handling grain located in the same region. Beyond the temporal scope of this report, Russian forces continued to attack the Odesa Oblast unabated, with estimates of 113 attacks between January and October 2024 alone, allegedly targeting ports and other critical infrastructure.⁵ Additionally, President Zelensky stated that, since July 2023, Russia has damaged 321 port infrastructure facilities alongside 20 foreign merchant vessels.⁶

This report follows GRC’s 2023 publication, *Agriculture Weaponised*⁷ and builds upon a confidential submission soon to be shared with the International Criminal Court and the UN COI on Ukraine. It has been reviewed by the Ukrainian Office of the Prosecutor General and confidential information shared from Ukrainian governmental counterparts formed part of the analysis and findings. The findings contribute to growing evidence that Russia’s targeting of agriculture constitutes part of a broader strategy of aggression and destruction.

These attacks are part of a systematic effort to dismantle Ukraine’s agricultural sector through occupation, destruction of infrastructure, and unlawful extraction. They form a pattern that extends beyond ports, to energy, water, and environmental systems—causing widespread humanitarian, environmental, and global food security consequences. The attacks on energy make it impossible to store critical food crops in proper conditions, causing them to spoil. Attacks on water infrastructure and transformer substations mean that agricultural areas are prevented from irrigation, this is in conjunction to repeated attacks on dams across Ukraine, often flooding rich agricultural areas and causing irreparable environmental damage. The devastating impact of these patterns of attacks on Ukraine’s agriculture and exports, on civilians and their way of life, and upon global food security, cannot be underestimated.

Preliminary Findings

- Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russian forces have allegedly targeted Ukraine's grain and related infrastructure through the following means:
 - i. The unlawful occupation of territory, and illegal appropriation, extraction, and export of Ukrainian grain;
 - ii. The initial *de facto* blockade of Black Sea Ports from February to June 2022;⁸ and
 - iii. After Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2023, through attacks against grain and related infrastructure located in the Black Sea and Danube ports, previously utilised to export grain.
- One of Russia's goals appears to have been to replace Ukraine as a top grain exporter worldwide, dismantling Ukraine's agricultural sector as a key source of national revenue. Had the Russian forces' goal been primarily military, one would expect to see more evidence of attacks on military objectives surrounding these facilities, which, based on an analysis of satellite imagery conducted by our experts, was almost absent.
- The widespread and coordinated kinetic attacks on grain and grain-related infrastructure in Odesa Oblast increased exponentially after Russia's withdrawal from the BSGI in July 2023, an initiative that was created to facilitate the safe export of grain, other foodstuffs, and fertilisers to world markets from operational Ukrainian Black Sea Ports.
- Numerous high-level Russian statements and prominent Russian-owned media outlets during and in the aftermath of the attacks investigated display clear support for the targeting of these civilian objects and their importance to Ukraine.
- Overall, the attacks featured in this report resulted in damage or destruction of a total of over 101.000 squared metres of grain storage area. Machinery crucial for the functioning of the grain export infrastructure was also rendered useless.
- These attacks strike at the heart of Ukraine's identity and will have reverberating and long-term impacts in terms of reconstruction, economic recovery, environmental damage and global food security.
- SMJT's investigation revealed that the attacks were launched using a variety of high-precision weapons, designed to strike designated targets with high-accuracy. The attack on Chornomorsk for instance entailed the use of multiple types of weapons and ammunitions and saw the probable involvement of units under strategic level commands. Such a coordinated attack would require authorisation from the Strategic Command of the Russian Armed Forces. Further, the use of long-range aircraft in combat requires a corresponding decision of the President of the Russian Federation.
- These attacks occur simultaneously alongside widespread patterns of attacks against critical civilian infrastructure across Ukraine which exacerbate the impact on agriculture.
- The SMJT found reasonable grounds to believe that, by launching the attacks outlined in this report, Russian forces committed the war crimes of attacks against civilian objects and destruction of enemy's property not justified by military necessity.