

Black Sea mine-hunt deal set to secure Ukraine exports path

By: Selcan Hacaoglu | Jan 11 2024 at 09:31 AM | [International Trade](#) | [Maritime](#)

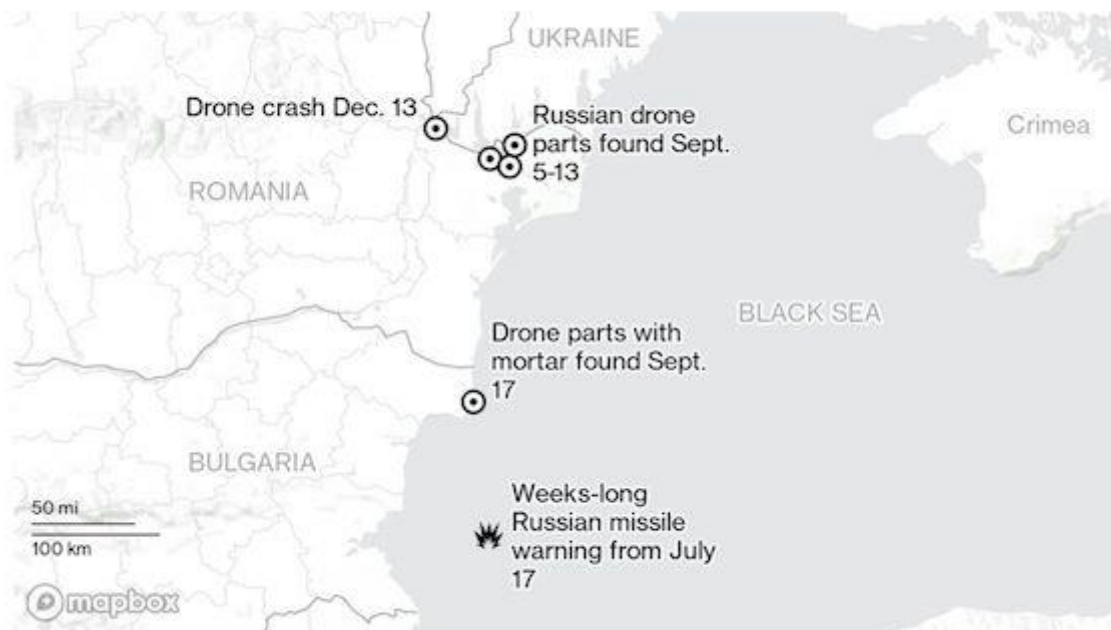
Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria joined forces to hunt mines in the Black Sea, a move aimed at improving shipping safety and shoring up vital Ukrainian grain exports to secure funding.

The Istanbul-led initiative is designed to defuse mines drifting into specific areas of the Black Sea as a result of Russia's near two-year invasion of Ukraine. A secondary motive is to exclude other NATO members from the security effort, including the US and UK, to avoid escalating tensions in the region.

Russia and Ukraine are both major producers of grain, and the war has increasingly threatened the safe passage of shipments. Ukraine nevertheless transported 15 million tons of cargo via its Black Sea corridor since mid-September, mainly foodstuffs, as flagging financial aid from allies makes it even more crucial for the country to ensure its commodities reach global markets. Strong shipments are also needed to clear last year's larger-than-expected harvest.

Russia's War Is Increasingly Spilling Over NATO Soil

Examples of incidents near the alliance's Black Sea borders



Source: Bloomberg

Bloomberg

A memorandum of understanding was signed Thursday in Istanbul, the first major joint action of Black Sea nations since President Vladimir Putin sent forces into Ukraine in February 2022. Turkey brokered a United Nations-backed agreement later

that year to ensure the free passage of Ukrainian grain via the Black Sea, but Russia abandoned the deal in July 2023.

A special shipping corridor was then established, particularly to protect grains coming from deep-sea ports.

NATO Split

While all three countries in the coalition are NATO allies, the initiative isn't being considered a NATO operation as such. Turkey opposes the presence of naval assets in the Black Sea from other NATO countries, including the US, arguing they could further fuel tensions in the region. Turkey last week said it won't allow the passage of two mine-hunting ships donated to Ukraine by Britain as long as the war is underway.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Ankara joined NATO allies in its condemnation and limited access through the Bosphorus strait for Russian naval vessels.