



[The Future of the Ukrainian Grain Deal is Up in the Air](#)

By Brenna Haggerty

Just two months after Russia left the Black Sea Grain Deal, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan believes the deal can be revived. This week, a friendly meeting between Erdogan and Russia's Vladimir Putin took place in Sochi, Russia. Turkey's main goal was to secure Russia's return to the grain deal. In preparation, Turkey and the United Nations worked on a new package to ease Russian concerns. While Erdogan stated that he believes a solution is imminent, Putin made it clear that Russia will only return to the deal if the West complies with its demands. Putin insists upon the removal of restrictions on the exportation of Russian fertilizer and food despite the West clearly stating that sanctions have never applied to agricultural exports.

The purpose of the grain deal was to allow Ukraine to safely use its ports on the Black Sea to export wheat and agricultural products to other countries. After leaving the grain deal in July, Russia increased the number of drone and missile strikes on Ukrainian ports and exporting infrastructure. Through these attacks, Russia destroyed over 220,000 tons of grain that could have gone to countries in the region, many of which are suffering from food shortages. These attacks add to the already dire issue of food scarcity. The United Nations asserted that originally the grain deal helped ease a food crisis, but Putin claims this crisis never existed. He states that there was never a physical shortage of food and prices did not rise after Russia's exit from the deal. Even so, experts say that failure to revive the deal would have "drastic impacts" on many African countries. In an effort to improve his reputation with the Global South, Putin said Russia is weeks away from a deal that will provide free grain to six African countries. He also plans to ship 1.1 million tons of cheap grain to Turkey for processing and distribution to countries in the region. It still remains to be seen if these plans will come to fruition. Many times, in the past, Putin's bold promises were often followed by lackluster results.

This meeting sparked negativity and cynicism in Ukraine. Erdogan said Ukraine should soften its position in negotiations with Russia in the future, but Ukraine said it will not change its stance. Ukraine's Foreign Minister insisted that Russia had no legal or political reason to abandon the deal. Now, after suffering multiple attacks on vital infrastructure, it is unlikely that Ukraine will "soften" its stance against Russia. In these negotiations, Putin claimed that the Black Sea should not be used for military purposes. Ukraine argued that Putin's invasion of the country is what caused the military presence in the Black Sea. Despite this deal being beneficial for their economy, Ukraine is not backing down even as Putin tries to shift blame. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba made their position very clear when he said they will no longer be "hostages to Russian blackmail."

It is possible that Putin is using the grain deal negotiations as a way to escape the Western sanctions that were placed on Russia after their invasion. Putin knows how important the grain deal is, not just for Ukraine, but for the Middle East and Africa as well. Now, he is using the deal as leverage to get rid of the sanctions hurting the Russian economy. Putin can also use these negotiations to fuel the Russian propaganda machine. Knowing that the West has no sanctions on agricultural imports, Putin can claim that he bested NATO and ended their trade sanctions on some Russian exports. This could boost war support among the Russian citizens. If the demands are not met,

Russia will still enjoy a monopoly of sorts on grain in the Black Sea. Record-breaking wheat harvests will help continue to prop up Russia's economy as sanctions take their toll.

Throughout the war, Turkey has thus far managed to maintain strong relations with NATO, Ukraine, and Russia. Turkey has maintained this impressive balancing act through a series of calculated policy decisions. It refused to enact sanctions against Russia while also supplying Ukraine with weapons. Turkey even supported Ukraine's bid to join NATO. With the added bonus of its geographical location in relation to the war, this unique position makes Turkey an excellent mediator for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. Turkey would also personally benefit as an end to the war would improve regional stability. Turkey has received much criticism from its NATO allies for its engagement with Russia, but this relationship could prove beneficial. The option of allowing Turkey more room to try and create an environment for negotiations must be explored. The reinstatement of the grain deal would allow Turkey to jumpstart broader peace negotiations. This being said, Turkey's ability to mediate negotiations between the two warring parties does not hinge entirely on the success of grain deal negotiations.

This war has become one of attrition, with little significant front-line movement. Though it seems unlikely that negotiations will bring an immediate end to the war, a ceasefire agreement would at least stop some of the bloodshed and resume the shipping of grain to countries that desperately need it. This would just be a temporary fix. A comprehensive peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine is the only way to ensure a permanent solution.