

# WHEAT EXPORTER RUSSIA BEGS CHINA FOR FOOD

As noted yesterday, the US government appears to be declassifying details of Russia's requests to China for help. After revealing *that* the US had learned of Russia's requests, yesterday (the same day in which Jake Sullivan had a seven hour meeting with Yang Jiechi) more details about what Russia requested were released. CNN even reported on a cable shared with allies detailing that Russia had asked for Meals Ready to Eat – basically food for its soldiers.

In a diplomatic cable, the US relayed to its allies in Europe and Asia that China had conveyed a willingness to assist Russia, which has asked for military support. The cable did not state definitively that assistance had been provided. One official also said the US warned in the cable that China would likely deny it was willing to provide assistance.

Among the assistance Russia requested was pre-packaged, non-perishable military food kits, known in the US as “meal, ready-to-eat,” or MREs, according to two sources familiar with the matter. The request underscores the basic logistical challenges that military analysts and officials say have stymied Russian progress in Ukraine – and raises questions about the fundamental readiness of the Russian military.

Forward-deployed units have routinely outstripped their supply convoys and open source reports have shown Russian troops breaking into grocery stores in search of food as the invasion has progressed. One of the sources suggested that food might be a request that China

would be willing to meet, because it stops short of lethal assistance that would be seen as deeply provocative by the west.

CNN is right that a request for MREs suggests a logistical failure to prepare for this invasion.

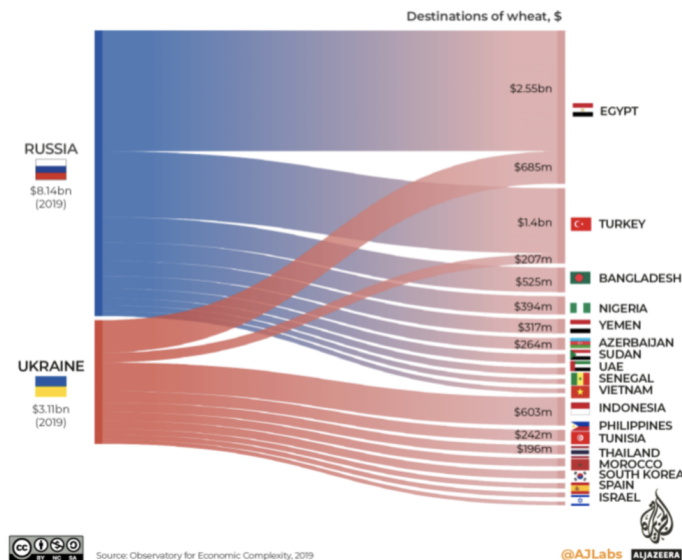
But the symbolism is far more alarming (which may be why it was included in a cable that got leaked).

As Al Jazeera notes, Russia is the world's largest wheat exporter, accounting for 18% of the total, with Ukraine another big producer.

## TRADE

### Who buys Russian and Ukrainian wheat?

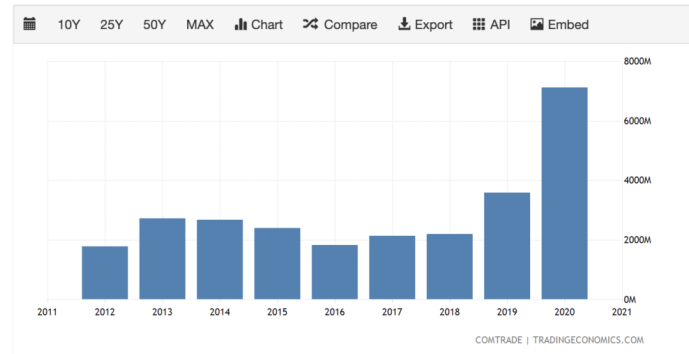
A quarter of the world's wheat exports came from Russia and Ukraine in 2019.



The sanctions on Russia and Ukrainian farmers' focus on capturing tanks will significantly impact wheat markets globally – though one key impact will be that Russia will send wheat to China instead of Egypt and Turkey.

Meanwhile, Ukraine exported over \$3 billion grain and other agricultural products to China in 2020.

Ukraine Exports to China was US\$7.12 Billion during 2020, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade. Ukraine Exports to China - data, historical chart and statistics - was last updated on March of 2022.



Unless Russia were to leave Ukraine today, most of those exports won't be delivered this year.

On top of all the other things that Russia did by invading Ukraine, it has created the conditions for food insecurity around the globe – the kind of food insecurity that large countries like China can ill afford.

That's going to happen, too, as COVID shutdowns in China are about to cause more supply chain crises around the globe.

At the moment that Russia is destabilizing both Europe and much of the world (in part because a key food producer will be harvesting tanks and cluster bombs instead of grain), Russia has asked China for help feeding its soldiers.