



Dire strait

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Dire strait-Russia must be persuaded to lower tensions with Ukraine

- Russia's capture of three Ukrainian naval ships and over 20 crew members in the disputed Azov Sea has refocussed international attention on the conflict on Europe's eastern corridors.
- The rapid escalation in tensions following the flare-up is evident.
- The latest incident coincides with the anniversary of the November 2013 Maidan Square protests in Ukraine demanding integration with Europe, which was the prelude to Russia's invasion of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014.
- The protracted conflict has so far claimed about 10,000 lives and displaced millions, and no lasting resolution is in sight.
- The 2014-15 Minsk peace accords prohibited air strikes and heavy artillery firing.
- But the dispute has dragged on into a smouldering low-intensity combat.
- The Ukraine-Russia conflict has also widened religious schisms.
- There has been renewed Western diplomatic pressure since the weekend's skirmishes, with the UN Security Council and NATO calling on Moscow and Kiev to de-escalate tensions.
- The geopolitical imperative of greater engagement with Moscow has never been more urgent, as hawks in the U.S. administration make no secret of their preference for confrontation over dialogue.
- The recent escalations could serve well the leaders of both Russia and Ukraine to divert attention from the sagging popularity levels at home.
- But the humanitarian situation arising from the continuing conflict brooks no delay in arriving at a speedy resolution.

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