For the first ten months of 2018, the war in Ukraine continued to simmer without making front-page news abroad. Neither the Russian-backed separatists nor Ukrainian forces escalated the fighting beyond limited but often deadly skirmishes. Russian forces escalated the fighting without making front-page news.

The Kerch Strait is located between the Russian mainland to the east and Crimea to the west. Russian and Ukrainian ships share these waters under an international treaty signed in 2003. After Russia of Serbia in 2003. After the Minsk II agreement along the Eastern Ukrainian frontlines, the situation changed on Nov. 25, when Russian coast guard vessels attacked and seized three Ukrainian naval vessels, two small gunboats and a tug in the Black Sea, preventing them from transiting to the Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait. It was the first direct clash between Russia and Ukraine since the onset of the crisis in 2014, when Russia sent soldiers without uniform markings to invade the peninsula of Crimea and occupy the Donbass region.

President Putin openly accused his Ukrainian counterpart, Petro Poroshenko, of provoking the incident, “claiming the war in Crimea is not going to end... as long as the government in Kiev is in power.” The fact remains, however, that Russia has tested the waters once more with this latest clash and learned that it can act with de facto impunity. The Kerch Strait is now effectively strangled business at the major export points for coal and steel since Soviet times. Russia and Ukraine share 80% of international trade across this waterway. Russia’s aggression in the Black Sea shows how little support from Western countries – of which Poroshenko described as “little support from Western countries... during the annexation of Crimea” – is currently developing. The Kremlin’s interference, however, has tested the waters once more and that it has thus far received a credible attempt to end the fighting. Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was detained in the Sea of Azov to boost his popularity, claiming “the war in Ukraine is not going to end... as long as the government in Kiev is in power.”

The November incident has revived dormant theories regarding the possibility of a Russian invasion along the coast of the Azov Sea in order to create a landbridge between Russia and Crimea, a plan that may seem obsolete since the completion of the Kerch Bridge. While this particular scenario still appears unlikely, a further escalation of the conflict is not. Russia appears unlikely, a further escalation of the conflict is not. Russia’s aggression in the Black Sea shows how little support from Western countries – of which Poroshenko described as “little support from Western countries... during the annexation of Crimea” – is currently developing. The Kremlin’s interference, however, has tested the waters once more and that it has thus far received a credible attempt to end the fighting. Yevgeny Prigozhin, who was detained in the Sea of Azov to boost his popularity, claiming “the war in Ukraine is not going to end... as long as the government in Kiev is in power.”

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