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Ukrainian adventurism in Black Sea risks pulling NATO into war with Russia – senators

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NATO support is encouraging Ukraine's recklessness in relations with Russia, but such provocation could lead to a military conflict in which the US-led alliance itself could become involved, the Russian Federation Council said.

Senators released a joint statement dedicated to NATO's 70th anniversary on Tuesday, paying special attention to the latest anti-Russian remarks coming from the organization.

US Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison said last week that a special *“package”* had been designed within the bloc *“to assure that there is a safe passage for Ukrainian vessels”* through the Kerch Strait.

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The narrow waterway connecting the Black Sea and Azov Sea, which Russia controls, became the venue of an intense standoff last November, when several Ukrainian vessels deliberately violated Russia's maritime border near the Kerch Strait. They were detained by the Russian coast guard, which chased the intruders and fired shots at them.

The Federal Council clarified that *“the passage of Ukrainian ships through the Kerch Strait is not a question of balance of power or NATO's presence in the Black Sea region, but solely the Ukrainian side's problem with observing the procedures, which it is well aware of and has*

*successfully fulfilled before.*

*"The attempts by Kiev to bypass those procedures carry the risk of a military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, in which NATO may also become involved," the statement warned.*

In fact, Russia hasn't banned Ukrainian vessels from crossing the Kerch Strait, and civilian ships do it on a daily basis. Military vessels have to notify the Russian port authorities of their passage in advance – something that wasn't done during the November crisis, which Moscow decried as a *"provocation"* by Kiev.

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The senators said that NATO's backing of non-member states Ukraine and Georgia *"pushes the leadership of those countries, who feel their impunity, to get involved in even more adventurism."*

Their statement also condemned NATO's eastward expansion and its military buildup around Russian borders. It also urged the bloc to resume dialogue with the Russian military based *"on mutual respect"* as the only way to reduce tensions.

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