

DANGEROUS MANOEUVRING: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE BLACK SEA ENCOUNTER AND THE RISKS POSED BY THE UKRAINE WAR

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The high-altitude [manoeuvring between two Russian fighter jets and an American drone](#) over the Black Sea, which resulted in the [splashing down of the U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone](#) on Tuesday morning, has underscored the dangerous risks of the [Ukraine war](#). In conflicting narratives about the incident, the Pentagon says the Russian Su-27s intercepted the surveillance drone in international airspace, dumping fuel on the drone, colliding with it and forcing it down. But the Russian Defence Ministry said its jets were scrambled after a U.S. drone violated its “temporary airspace” off the Crimean peninsula (declared for its war in Ukraine) and that the American aerial vehicle “lost altitude” in “sharp manoeuvring”. The MQ-9 recorded the incident. The video has been declassified and would help establish the truth. But whatever the reason, the fact that the U.S. lost a drone in the Black Sea, where it does not even have a naval presence, is a grave reminder of how close the nuclear powers have come to a conflict. While both sides have responded with maturity, the underlying situation that triggered this crisis remains unchanged.

The U.S. has provided over \$30 billion in military assistance, including advanced defensive and offensive weapons, to Ukraine since the Russian invasion began, and imposed tough sanctions on Moscow. Washington says it is not directly involved in the war but is helping Ukraine defend its territories, while Russia alleges that the “collective West” is seeking to destroy it. As the war drags on, with Russia’s failure to take a quick victory, the relationship between Washington and Moscow has broken down. Last month, Russia suspended its participation in the New START nuclear arms control treaty, the last of the Cold War-era weapons control mechanisms between the two countries. Steadily deepening mutual distrust amid an ongoing conflict is a perfect recipe for disaster in great power rivalries. Even if the Biden administration has clearly ruled out a direct conflict with Russia, irresponsible and high-risk manoeuvring or even accidents could lead to, as the Pentagon said, “miscalculation and unintended escalation”. The U.S. and Russia already have a deconfliction hotline to avoid mid-air collisions in different theatres where they operate. They should use that mechanism around Ukraine as well to avoid a repeat of incidents such as the Black Sea one. But a bigger challenge is to arrest the deterioration of their bilateral ties, which is now reminiscent of the bilateral hostility of the first two decades of the Cold War. If the U.S. and Russia address this problem and find some stability between themselves, it would help them bring the war in Ukraine to an end.

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