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Kremlin Rebuffs Call to Release Detained Ukrainian Sailors

By Reuters

May 27, 2019

Ukrainian Navy sailors in court **Maxim Shipenkov / EPA / TASS**

The Kremlin on Monday rebuffed a call by an international maritime tribunal for Russia to release 24 Ukrainian sailors, saying the court had no jurisdiction over the strait where Russian security forces captured them.

The Hamburg-based International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) on Saturday said Moscow should release the sailors immediately and that both nations should refrain from taking any action that might aggravate the dispute.

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The Russian Navy captured the Ukrainian sailors and their three vessels in the Kerch Strait, which links the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, on Nov. 25, 2018, after opening fire on them.

The waterway separates Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and Russia.

The ITLOS was established to settle maritime disputes by the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, of which both Ukraine and Russia are signatories. But it has no means of enforcing its decisions.

"The convention on the law of the sea from 1982 is not applicable in the case of the Kerch Strait," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call. He did not elaborate on why the convention did not apply.

Russia plans to press ahead with its investigation into the incident in which the Ukrainian sailors were captured and to take the matter to trial, Peskov was quoted by the daily Vedomosti newspaper as saying late on Sunday.

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