
KAZAKHSTAN'S NAVY TO DEVELOP ANTI-TERRORISM CAPACITIES

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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, the four new countries that emerged around the northern Caspian shore [Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan] with their southern neighbor Iran have been developing their offshore hydrocarbon reserves. This scramble for natural resources has, in turn, raised the question of how best to safeguard them [a] growing concern all over the world in an age of intensifying transnational terrorist threats.

According to the deputy chairperson of Kazakhstans National Security Committee (NSC), Daulet Ergozhin, the NSC plans to expand the network of anti-terrorism headquarters in the country by establishing an operational naval headquarters covering the Caspian Sea. He presented a draft law on the matter, which is expected to come into force in early 2018. Ergozhin told a September 29 Ministry of Justice interdepartmental commission meeting, As you know, we have many offshore deposits, such as [the] Kashagan [oil and natural gas super-field] and artificial islands. Gas and oil are produced under the conditions of high temperatures and great pressure. These are so-called sites vulnerable to terrorists and we must protect them (The Astana Times, October 8).

Domestic concerns about Kazakhstans maritime frontiers have been increasing in recent years. On October 4, the commander-in-chief of Kazakhstans Navy, Zhandarbek Zhanzakov, told the Kazakhstani Senate that the country lagged behind its Caspian neighbors in increasing its naval forces. In particular, he stressed mounting threats from international terrorism as well as the potential for sabotage activities against maritime targets, including oil pipelines, ports and oil-production centers, as important considerations for strengthening the Navy. Dariga Nazarbaeva, the chairperson of Senate Committee on International Relations, Defense and Security and the daughter of Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev, subsequently proposed launching a three-year program to strengthen the countrys maritime border (Flot.com, October 4).

Kazakhstans upgraded naval facilities will represent another decisive break with the Caspian regions Soviet past. Prior to 1991, the Soviet Unions port in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, was the only state-of-the-art naval base on the shores of this inland sea. However, the Kazakhstani NSC is now proposing to develop a brand new naval facility on the opposite shore. This permanent

maritime operational headquarters will specifically combat terrorist acts committed against Kazakhstan's maritime economic activity on its Caspian continental shelf as well as attempted attacks targeting naval or merchant vessels. Notably, these tasks are currently the responsibility of the NSC's Border Service; but after the opening of the operational headquarters on the Caspian, they will legally come under the Navy's oversight (The Astana Times, October 8).

The Kazakhstani Navy's new focus on offshore Caspian waters is an outgrowth of the publication, last month, of the revised Military Doctrine of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which states that among the main military threats to Kazakhstan are the globalization of terrorism and extremism, [and the] expansion of geography of their actions and activities (Mod.gov.kz, September 29; see EDM, October 23).

The deployment of naval forces by the Caspian littoral states poses several unique strategic considerations. The 143,244-square-mile Caspian Sea is the world's largest enclosed body of water and is an endorheic sea: rivers only flow into it, with no natural egress to the open ocean. As Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have sought to augment their naval forces (see EDM, April 2, 2013; July 25, 2016), they have been largely stymied by the fact that the Caspian's sole entrance and egress, the man-made Volga-Don Canal, is under Russian sovereignty as an internal waterway, limiting the states' options of importing foreign-built warships (see EDM, May 5, 2014).

One issue awaiting final resolution between the five Caspian countries is their ultimate division of its offshore waters and seabed (see EDM, May 8, 2017); the interim solution has been for each state to develop resources in waters that would clearly be within their area of jurisdiction whatever the final resolution. The murkiness of the Caspian's maritime frontiers has produced more than rhetorical clashes in the past. Most notably, in July 2001, Iran sent military aircraft and a warship to intimidate two Azerbaijani survey vessels contracted by BP into leaving the Alov-Araz-Sharg field. Azerbaijan had claimed that site was well within its national sector, which Iran disputed.

At present, all the Caspian naval powers are making expressions of goodwill, including by conducting friendly port visits to one another. Illustratively, in September, the ships of the Russian Caspian Flotilla conducted two weeks of training exercises and visited Kazakhstan's Aktau and Iran's Enzeli port (Topwar.ru, September 2).

While the maritime relations between the quintet of Caspian countries are generally friendly at present, their perceptions of the tactical and strategic value of their naval forces vary widely. For the post-Soviet states of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, their primary naval priorities are to safeguard their maritime frontiers by largely dealing with regional concerns such as smuggling and poaching. In contrast, the Russian government sees a far broader regional strategic role for its naval forces in the Caspian than its neighbors. For one thing, Moscow considers the Caspian basin a secure launch site for cruise missiles and a storage depot for Russian ships

equipped with precision-guided weapons: a case in point was the October 7, 2015, launch of 26 Kalibr SS-N-30A cruise missiles by four Russian warships in the Caspian at targets in Syria (see EDM, October 8, 26, 2015).

Twenty-six years after the collapse of Communism, all the post-Soviet Caspian countries now have expensive offshore facilities and infrastructure to protect, none more so than Kazakhstan, whose Kashagan oil and gas field is the worlds sole super-field to be discovered in the last four decades. Kashagans operators are seeking to increase production by the end of the year to 370,000 barrels per day (bpd) from its current rate of 200,000 bpd, in an effort to recoup some of the projects massive investment costs (Neftgaz.ru, October 12). Whether the Kazakhstani Navy will prove more adapt than the NSC Border Service in guarding against possible future terrorist attacks against such lucrative targets remains an unsettled future question in Astana.

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