



Military Benefits of the Caspian Sea Convention for Russia’s Power Projection Capabilities

by Nurlan Aliyev

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OE Watch Commentary: In late August 2018, Russia’s Caspian Flotilla, in conjunction with aviation and coastal air-defense groups, carried out special exercises in the Caspian Sea to test a new tactical formation for detecting and neutralizing low-flying missiles or aircraft. This exercise occurred only days after the heads of the five Caspian littoral states met and signed a Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. Among other key points found in the Convention, the document approved Moscow’s aim of legally closing the sea to military forces of any non-littoral states.

Despite Moscow’s habitually peaceful statements and its insistence on keeping the Caspian a conflict-free basin, over the past few years Russia has been conspicuously increasing its military presence there. Moscow can and has used the Caspian Flotilla in its military operation in the Middle East and to further flex its muscles in the Sea of Azov (connected to the Caspian via an internal canal across southwestern Russia). In 2018, Marine Corps units of the Caspian flotilla received new BTR-82A armored personnel carriers. Moreover, the defense ministry plans to complete the construction of a new home naval base for the Caspian Flotilla at the port in Kaspiisk (Republic of Dagestan) by 2020. The new base will be already able to receive the first warships by the end of 2018.

On the eve of the fifth Caspian summit, an air task force from Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD) conducted joint exercises with units of the Caspian Flotilla. These forces trained how to destroy hypothetical enemy vessels. And several days after the signing of the Caspian Sea Convention, Russia’s Caspian Flotilla exercised new tactics involving special formations of reconnaissance ships and aircraft, fighter jets, and coastal air-defense systems. According to the head of the SMD press office, this approach allowed Russian military units to significantly increase the range of detection of low-flying targets, including cruise missiles.

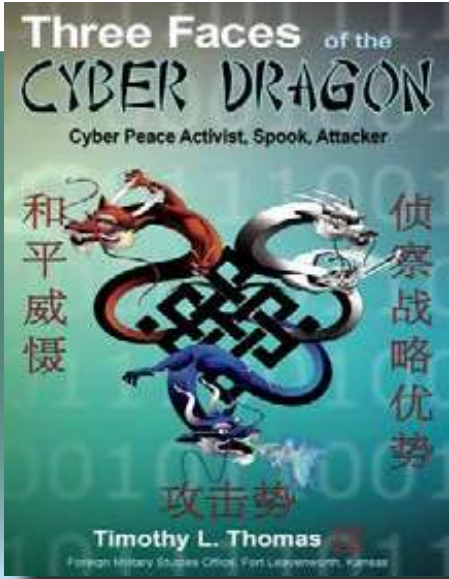
Moreover, the tactical method also opened up new possibilities for the use of Podsolnukh-E surface-to-surface radar stations and Buk-M3 (SA-17 Grizzly) surface-to-air missile systems at sea. According to the SMD, the joint training of the air forces of the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla are currently being worked out on a systematic basis. Naval units of the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla, the Air Force, and the Air and Missile Defense Forces of the SMD have practiced jointly establishing defensive lines along the Black Sea and the Caspian coasts against cruise missiles. Since last April, MiG-31 fighter jets armed with Kinzhal hypersonic rocket systems have been patrolling in the Caspian Sea region. The defense ministry has said that the patrols are carried out within the framework of strategic deterrence.

Article 3, paragraphs 6 and 7 of the recently signed Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea explicitly call for the “non-presence in the Caspian Sea of armed forces not belonging to the parties” and forbid the signatories from allowing their territory to be used by “other States to commit aggression and undertake other military actions against any party”. Russian President Vladimir Putin appraised the Convention as a positive example of successful cooperation under difficult global conditions.

The Convention not only legalizes Russia’s military hegemony over the Caspian but also prevents any outside powers from introducing a military presence in the region. This situation enables Moscow to continue to use the Caspian basin as a military testing ground as well as a base from which to conduct armed operations. As such, Russian forces stationed in the Caspian can not only provide a conventional (defensive) deterrent but also be employed in offensive outward operations—the so-called “bastion” strategy, illustrated several times when Caspian Flotilla vessels launched cruise missile strikes on targets in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Aliyev)**

Source: “Авиация ЮВО уничтожила в Каспийском море корабли условного противника (Aviation of the Southern Military District destroyed ships of the conditional enemy in the Caspian Sea),” *Izvestiya*, 25 July 2018. <https://iz.ru/770487/2018-07-25/aviatciia-iuvo-unichtozhila-v-kaspiiskom-more-korabli-uslovnogo-protivnika>

...According the scenario, UAVs found a group of enemy ships in the waters of the Caspian Sea, the coordinates of which were relayed to a joint control center. “The enemy was destroyed by an aviation group of Su-30SM fighters, Su-24 and Su-34 bombers in addition to Su-25 aircraft...”



China’s cyber policy appears to have three vectors —peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner— that dominate China’s cyber policy. Some are always hidden from view while others are demonstrated daily. Three Faces of the Cyber Dragon is divided into sections that coincide with these vectors.

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