

A Short Walk around the Caspian Sea Richard Ten Dyke

Note: This material was Prepared for Great Decisions, Katonah Chapter discussion and is provided for reference only. Much of the material has been obtained from the Internet, notably Wikipedia. Other references include "The New Great Game" by Lutz Klevemna (2003), Newsletters of the Embassy of Azerbaijan, and personal conversation with Azerbaijan ambassador Yashar Aliyev.

The Caspian Sea is roughly 750 miles long and 200 miles wide. Its five littoral countries, are, clockwise: Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan.



The world's largest enclosed body of water, it is three times larger than Lake Superior. It is fed by the Volga and Ural rivers in Russia, and 29 others and has no outlet to the sea.

It has one-third the salinity of ocean water. It is sometimes called a sea and sometimes a lake. The distinction is important. As a lake, the littoral countries must share in the lake's total resources. As a Sea, the body of water is divided up with separate portions

assigned to the littoral states. Then it is important where the oil fields are.

Once famous as a source for caviar, the supply is restricted due to over-fishing.

Except for Iran, the countries bordering the Caspian Sea were part of the USSR before independence in 1991.

For our walk, we will start in Georgia, and then travel clockwise until we get back to Azerbaijan

Georgia

Georgia is located in the North Caucasus. Moving clockwise, Georgia borders the Black Sea, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey.

It is the birthplace of Ioseb Jughashvili [Yoseb Yughashvilli] (Josph Stalin).

Georgia claims the territories of Abkhazia, (with valuable ports on the Black Sea) and South Ossetia (in the north). However, in 1990 - 1992 these territories declared their independence from Georgia. To avoid further conflict, Russia sent in "Peacekeepers" and established a military presence.



In 2008, Georgia started a new war to remove the Peacekeepers from these territories. Five days later, following a cease-fire, Russia prevailed and strengthened its control over these regions. Tensions still remain high.

During the war, Russian troops approached Tbilisi, Georgia, and

could have cut an important oil pipeline between Baku and the Mediterranean, but they did not.

Georgia's president Mikheil Saakashvili, is considered to be pro-western. He went to Columbia Law School and GWU, but is thought by many to be a bit of a loose canon.

Russia

The territories of Russia that borders the Caspian Sea includes Chechnya and North Ossetia,

A Muslim Republic, Chechnya was not granted independence with the other republics in 1991 and is the location of constant bloody conflict since the breakup of the USSR.

1999 “the second Chechen War” resulted in the systematic destruction of Grozny, its capital. Rebuilding has continued but is unfinished. Rail and air facilities have been reopened.

In 2004, in North Ossetia (tucked between Chechnya and Georgia) Chechen rebels took 1,100 children and adults hostage in a school. On the third day, Russian troops stormed the school, leaving 334 of the hostages dead.

Muriel, I and the Kornfields were on a tour boat in the Volga, and watched the news as it broke over the televisions.

There is little oil or gas in this region. The economy is in a shambles. But for Russia it has a strategic location.

Kazakhstan

Population 16.4 million.

Twice the size of Alaska, 25% larger than the Louisiana purchase

It is bordered by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan. Note: It covers the distance from from Russia to China.

It is the former home of Russia’s nuclear testing site and rocket launching site.

It has a large land area, 25 per cent larger than the Louisiana Purchase, with varied terrain, from deserts to snow covered mountains.

Oil and gas reserves contribute 24 percent of the GDP Also uranium.

It is culturally diverse, offers freedom of religion with mostly Sunni Muslim(70%) and Christian (26 percent, mostly Russian Orthodox)

Its recent president, Nursultan Nazarbayev was recently re-elected with 95.5 percent of the vote. (It might even have been a mostly legitimate vote.)

A developed, sophisticated, westernized, technically oriented country. Example: equestrian sports, a pastime of an upper middle class, are quite popular. Since 1993 their Equestrian Federation has been organizing national and international events including show jumping, dressage, eventing, and endurance.

See New Yorker (April 18, 2011) article about Kazakhstan

Turkmenistan

Population 5.1 million

Untapped wealth. Fourth in the world to Russia, Iran, Qatar in Natural Gas reserve, which are inland from the Caspian

Saparmurat Niyazov, a dictator, remained in power after 1991, running the country as a communist state. He styled himself as the promotor of traditional Turkmen culture, calling himself "Leader of the turkmen people." He was known for his cult of personality. He outlawed Opera and the Circus as not being sufficiently "Turkmen." He named the days of the week after himself. He Declared himself President For Life in 1999, but died in 2006

Current President, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedof, [gur bang ulie birdy muck ahmed off] is more reasonable. He signed a decree to build an additional gas pipeline 600 miles from fields in the East to the Caspian Coast.

China will soon become its largest buyer of Gas through a pipeline linking the two countries through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan

Iran

Population 74 million

Borders: Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Persian Gulf, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan

Discussed here in November, 2010

Short short history:

333 B.C. Alexander the Great defeats Darius who flees, leaving behind

his army, wife, two daughters, and mother.
1951 Mossadegh, elected. Nationalizes oil
1953 Mossadegh overthrown, Shah installed. CIA implicated
“fearing communism”
1979 Goodby Shah, Hello Ayatolla Khomeini
1980 Iraq invades Iran
1980 Hostage Crisis
1982 Hostages released after 444 days
1988 Ceasefire in Iran-Iraq war after huge casualties
1989 Rafsanjani becomes president
2004 Conservatives re-establish control
2005 Hello Ahmadinejad

Iran is energy rich. It has oil in the south, near the Persian Gulf.

But Iran needs oil in the North. Yes, it could build a pipeline.

Rather, it has arranged swap deals with Kazakhstan to import oil for the north, and export an equal amount from the South. This gets around the sanctions because Kazakhstan is a country not a company.

Interesting note: Iran has an Azeri population greater than Azerbaijan.

Armenia

Population 3.2 Million

Trivia question: where do most Armenians live? Answer: United States (8 million)

Landlocked: Surrounded by Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Iran

Important history is the Turkish “genocide” of Armenians in 1914-1915. Estimated 600,000 deaths. Death March. Turkey viewed Armenia as a threat, siding with Russia. There was an Armenian volunteer contingent in the Russian Army.

Blockade between Turkey and Armenia exists to this day.

Borders of New Armenia drawn by United States (Woodrow Wilson) in 1920.

Armenians occupy a territory called Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan claims this as its own territory.

This conflict resulted in full scale war. The Armenians prevailed resulting in a cease-fire in 1994. Issue is still unresolved.

Widespread emigration after 1914 causes the diaspora to be greater than the population of Armenia itself (8 million vs. 3 million). As a result, Armenia has a strong Washington lobby.

Armenia has few natural resources. Fuel imported from Russia. Armenia receives strong support from Armenian abroad.

Many Armenians are found in the sciences and the arts. I worked for one, Paul Dergarabedian.

Azerbaijan

Population 9 million. It is strategically located, connecting the Caspian Sea with Turkey in the South Caucasus,

It is bordered by the Caspian Sea, Iran, Armenia, Turkey, and Georgia and Russia.

It includes the geographically separated Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic which is sandwiched between Iran, Turkey and Armenia.

A Muslim parliamentary republic, it is notable for having granted women's suffrage before the United States and England.

President is Ilham Aliyev son of Heydar Aliyev former KGB officer who became president following breakup of USSR.

It is striving, slowly, to be more open. Pushing computers in schools, looking to increase tourism.

Once referred to as the most corrupt country in Asia. A political protest: "Day of Rage," occurred on March 11, 2011, but was not very successful.

In the war with Armenia, from 1991 to 1994 30,000 Azeri were killed and one million Azeri displaced. For the Azeri the war is not over. Here is a news item.

WASHINGTON, D.C. March 10, 2011 – In a new unspeakable atrocity committed by the Armed Forces of Armenia, a 9 year-old Azerbaijani boy Fariz Badalov was shot dead by an Armenian sniper on March 8, 2011 in Azerbaijan's Aghdam District. The boy, while playing outside his house, was wounded in the head "when a sniper opened fire from the Armenian-occupied territory" and died on the way to hospital, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense said.

Oil was discovered in 1871. For the 20th century, it was Russia's principle resource, and once supplied 75 per cent of Russia's oil needs.



In WWII, German troops tried to capture it but were stopped at Stalingrad.

1995 Azerbaijan signed the \$30 billion "contract of the century" with 14 oil companies.

BP, Amoco, LUKoil, Pennzoil, UNOCAL, Statoil, McDermott, Ramco, TPAO, Amerada Hess, and SOCAR (Azerbaijan), ExxonMobil, ITOCHU, and INPEX.

This resulted in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline which was officially opened on July 13, 2006 and now transports crude oil to tankers on the Mediterranean Sea

A proposed gas pipeline, called Nabucco after the Opera, will connect Gas fields to Eastern Europe, and may be constructed even over Russia's objections. Russia has an competing pipeline, Bluetream, which runs under the Black Sea.

The Nabucco pipeline is so called because at end of the opera King Nabucco is triumphant.

Summary

Many issues are boiling in the Caspian /Caucasus Region, having mostly to do with land, oil and gas, and human rights. The issues are intertwined.

Oil in the Caspian basin has been estimated to be worth \$12 trillion, or more, depending on current pricing. More gas fields are being discovered. The energy supply has three potential destinations, Eastern Europe, China, and the western world.

In 1998 Dick Cheney said: "I can't think of a time when we've had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian. Cheney made subsequent visits to the region as Vice President under George W. Bush.

A proposed Trans-Caspian oil and gas pipeline. would allow western markets easier access to Kazakh oil, and potentially Uzbek and Turkmen gas as well. It could connect to the Nabucco gas pipeline to eastern Europe. Russia officially opposes the trans-Caspian project on environmental grounds. (Russia does not object to its own pipelines under the Baltic or the Black Sea, however) The pipelines would bypass Russia and destroy their current monopoly on westward-bound gas exports.

By the way, *Oil and water may not mix, but oil and politics do.*

Discussion Topics

- 1) Does the United States have commercial interests in the Caucasus / Caspian Region that should be protected by the force of our government? (Think Exxon-Mobil)
- 2) Oil, Politics, and Corruption blend like the Andrews Sisters. Should the United States use foreign policy tools to ameliorate corruption because of its negative impact on human rights.
- 3) Should the United States take a side in the Armenia - Azerbaijan conflict, considering the 8 million Armenians living in the United States.
- 4) Should the United States Congress damage its relations with Turkey and pass a resolution calling the Armenian Massacre in 1915 a Genocide?
- 5) Should the United States potentially damage its relations with Russia by giving its support to the planned Nabucco Pipeline? Consider the same for China.
- 6) Should the United States support Georgia militarily if another war breaks out with Russia over Abkhazia or North Ossetia. Similarly, should the United States continue to ignore Russian atrocities in Chechnya
- 7) How do our relations with the Caucasus / Caspian countries have to be tailored to our objectives in dealing with (a) Iran, (b) Afghanistan (c) Pakistan. (d) Turkey (Consider military bases and fly-over zones for example.)
- 8) What should be the United States policy toward corrupt, non-democratic, authoritarian governments whose capabilities are important to american interests.