

Research on Strategic Position and Inherent Contradictions of Caspian Sea Caspian Convention and the Game between Caspian States

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ABSTRACT

The Caspian Sea is located at the junction of the Eurasian continent, and its geo-strategic position is very important. At the same time, it has abundant energy and biological resources and has become an important area for strategic competition among major powers. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the geopolitical situation in the Caspian Sea area has changed drastically. The countries along the Caspian Sea changed from the former Soviet Union and Iran to five countries including Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The five countries divided the Caspian Sea and the seabed. There was a fierce battle over the issue. In 2018, the five countries signed the "Convention on the Legal status of the Caspian Sea" and achieved significant cooperation results on issues involving the legal nature of the Caspian Sea, regional security, water delimitation, resources and energy. This article comprehensively clarifies the causes and consequences of the delimitation of the Caspian Sea, sorts out the crux and delimitation methods, and provides help for us to deepen our understanding of the delimitation of the Caspian Sea. It also provides assistance for our country's understanding of the East Sea and South Island reef disputes and maritime delimitation.

Keywords: *Delimitation of the Caspian Sea; Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea; Caspian Convention; Five Caspian States.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Caspian Sea region connects Central Asia, West Asia and the Caucasus, and is located in the heart of the Eurasian continent, and is called the "world island" by the British geophysicist Mackinder, and is also the intersection of various civilizations, cultures and religions, with a very important strategic position, and the Caspian Sea bed is rich in oil and gas resources, and has always been a hot spot for the U.S. and Russia and other major powers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet republics around the Caspian Sea have become independent, Russia is experiencing the pain of national transformation, plagued by domestic problems and no energy, the influence on the Caspian countries has declined significantly, and the huge potential of the Caspian Sea hydrocarbon resources have not been fully recognized by all countries, the situation in the Caspian Sea region was once calm. On August 12, 2018, the summit of the five Caspian Sea countries was held in Aktau, Kazakhstan, where the President of Kazakhstan

Nazarbayev, President of Russia Vladimir Putin, President of Azerbaijan Aliyev, President of Iran Rouhani, and President of Turkmenistan Berdymukhamedov met. The five countries signed the historic Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea (hereinafter referred to as the Caspian Sea Convention). The Caspian Sea Convention has achieved ground breaking and historic results in the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the delimitation of waters, hydrocarbon energy and regional security, which are of most concern to all countries.

2. THE ORIGIN OF DELIMITATION OF THE CASPIAN SEA AND THE GAME

2.1. *The geopolitical environment and location advantages of the Caspian Sea*

The Caspian Sea is located at the combination of the Eurasian continent, with a length and width of about 1200 km and 320 km, respectively, and is rich in energy and

biological resources. During the Cold War, only two countries existed around the Caspian Sea - the Soviet Union and Iran, which signed a treaty on joint sovereignty over the Caspian Sea in the middle and early 20th century. In 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved into 15 states, of which Russia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan jointly inherited the Soviet Union's sovereignty over Caspian Sea, thus changing the Caspian coast from 2 states to 5.

Since the new century, the global economy has been growing steadily, which has also increased the demand for energy. At the same time, because the wars were frequent in the Middle East, exporters have raised energy prices. According to the U.S. Department of Energy field surveys and data studies, the Caspian Sea region's oil reserves amount to 200 billion barrels, accounting for about one-fifth of the world's total energy.

2.2. The Caspian Sea delimitation and its game

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the previous treaties related to the Caspian Sea ceased to be valid and countries sought to conclude new treaties on the delimitation of the Caspian Sea.

2.2.1. Policies of Coastal States

The main point of contention among the five littoral states of the Caspian Sea is the legal status of the Caspian Sea, i.e. whether it is a lake or a sea. [1]

For Turkmenistan, due to the lack of diversification of its economic structure, it relies mainly on energy development. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the previous treaties related to the Caspian Sea ceased to be valid and countries sought to conclude new treaties on the delimitation of the Caspian Sea. Yet Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are rich in hydrocarbon resources on their offshore continental shelves. They prefer to suppose Caspian Sea as a "sea". Russia and Iran, on the other hand, do not need to establish the status of the Caspian Sea and its delimitation prematurely because of their rich hydrocarbon resources and relatively diversified economic structures, but they are concerned about if they will get relatively smaller amount of hydrocarbon resources that can be delimited according to the rules of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As well as they ought to avoid the intervention of extraterritorial countries. [2]They proposed that the Caspian Sea is a "lake" Turkmenistan at first supported Russia and Iran on this issue, because its oil and gas exports depended mainly on the channels established by Russia and Iran in its territory, but based on national interests and political changes in the country, it turned to the camp of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. All these contradictions led to the continuation of negotiations between the countries from the mid-1990s, which ended in failure time and again.

2.2.2. Strategies of Extraterritorial Powers

Due to the geographical location of the Caspian Sea and the size of the economies of the littoral states, the oil and gas from the Caspian Sea region must be exported through the establishment of oil and gas pipelines in order to realize economic benefits. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, as small regional states with relatively weak economic and political power, rely mainly on Russian pipelines to transport hydrocarbon resources, and in order to reduce their unequal status caused by their sensitivity and vulnerability in relations with Russia, they are eager to establish other pipelines. Yet, because they lack strong enough political power to pursue their own economic interests, they actively introduce extraterritorial power.

The U.S.-led Western countries, on the one hand, focus on their long-term strategic planning to control energy sources, hoping to achieve diversification of energy imports to avoid excessive dependence on Middle East oil, and on the other hand, they also want to take the opportunity to gain a foothold in the Caspian Sea region, holding Russia and Iran (two rival countries), to curb their power expansion. So on the issue of the Caspian Sea demarcation, the U.S. and Europe actively encouraged the relevant countries to "de-Russification", such as promoting Azerbaijan to build its own pipeline, bypassing Russia and Iran to achieve the Caspian Sea oil resources outbound.[3] Besides, they actively coordinating with Kazakhstan to make it join the project. The U.S. and Europe also actively support Turkmenistan's construction of a pipeline that bypasses Russia under the sea, pulling Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan into the NATO Partnership Program and providing military assistance to the three countries. Due to the long-standing conflicts of interest between the countries bordering the Caspian Sea and extraterritorial countries, the phenomenon of "security dilemma" along the Caspian Sea is constantly emerging, and countries have expanded their naval forces in an attempt to defend their interests through strength, making the security situation in the Caspian Sea region worrying.[4]

3. SPECIFIC PROCESS AND REASONS FOR THE CONVENTION

3.1. The specific process of the convention

The conflict of fundamental interests and the unwillingness of countries to compromise have caused repeated failures of multilateral cooperation. After the new century, both the international and regional situations have changed, leading the countries around the Caspian Sea to adjust their positions and start seeking negotiations and cooperation. The specific negotiation process can be divided into three stages.

1. The first stage

Between Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The Western countries' interference in the internal affairs of Central Asian countries under the banner of "democracy" aroused great discontent and fear in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, so they turned to Russia for support, and Russia responded positively to their actions to ease relations by proposing the idea of "dividing the water bottom and sharing the waters." In 1996, Kazakhstan and Russia reached a consensus on the Caspian Sea and issued a joint declaration, then two years later agreed on the delimitation of the northern part of the Caspian Sea by signing a series of agreements. In 2002, Azerbaijan and Russia also signed the agreement on the delimitation of the Caspian Sea undersea area and agreed on the delimitation of the border based on the "median line principle".[5]

2. The Second stage

Turkmenistan joined the cooperation with the first three countries. In 2007, the Presidents of Turkmenistan, Russia and Kazakhstan met and agreed to jointly build a pipeline project from Turkmenistan, through Russia and Kazakhstan, and finally to Europe. The construction of the pipeline not only satisfies the economic development needs of Russia and Turkmenistan, but also gives Russia greater initiative in exporting energy to Europe and in diplomacy with Europe (avoiding the EU's direct energy cooperation with Central Asia, bypassing Russia).

3. The Third Stage

Western sanctions prompted an isolated Iran to join the cooperation with the four littoral states. After the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008, the U.S. and Europe were too preoccupied with their domestic affairs to intervene in the Caspian Sea. [6]The five countries took advantages of the situation and signed a declaration on the legal status of the Caspian Sea between Russia and Iran at the fourth summit of the five heads of state, which later became the basis of the Caspian Sea Convention. In 2015, the five Caspian Sea littoral states held their first joint maritime military exercises under Russian leadership, reflecting a significant deepening of their cooperation.

3.2. Reasons for the Caspian Sea Convention

Firstly, the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the subsequent struggle for hegemony in the Middle East has caused strong discontent among the Trump administration in the United States. [7]The U.S. forced the Iranian government to compromise by putting extreme pressure on Iran. Iran, in order to relieve its internal and diplomatic pressure, prevented non-coastal states from stationing troops in the Caspian Sea as a way to prevent U.S. infiltration into Iran through other countries. Therefore, Iran has taken care to avoid too

much bad with Russia and decided to have good relations with all the coastal countries.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western countries have been interfering in the internal affairs of Central Asian countries on the grounds of "democracy" and containing the westward expansion of Russia's power. Russia and Iran are in a similar situation, and both countries are afraid that Western forces will take the opportunity to intervene in the Caspian Sea and affect their own interests, especially the establishment of NATO naval bases in the Caspian Sea region. [8]Therefore, Russia and Iran abandoned their previous hard-line approach to the Caspian Sea and agreed to sign a convention, in which Russia agreed to make concessions to Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan on the issue of economic interests, allowing "the construction of the pipeline without the consent of all coastal states, but only with the consent of the countries through which the pipeline passes"[9], and started a concrete negotiation process among the five countries. In the course of 22 years, 50 special working meetings and Caspian summits were held.

Although the five countries have conflicting economic interests, there is a great deal of need for cooperation in terms of political interests. The Caspian region itself is an international hotspot with many problems affecting regional and international security and development, such as the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the religious sphere, the expansion of terrorism brought about by poverty, war and power, the rising pursuit of nuclear weapons by Iran. [10]These issues pose a major threat to the security, stability and economic development of the Caspian Sea region, and require the Caspian littoral states to abandon the tensions arising from border demarcation issues and seek some cooperation in order to reach a coordinated effort and effective solution.

4. THE MAIN IMPACTS AND INSPIRATIONS OF THE CONVENTION

Firstly, convention's resolutions of legal issues, water delimitation, division of hydrocarbon resources, and regional security issues in the Caspian Sea effectively think about and deal with the interests of the littoral states, and ease tensions among them. At the same time, the convention's restrictions on the military and economic rights of non-Caspian littoral states such as the U.S. and Europe in the the area have greatly reduced the complexity and difficulty of solving their(5 countries') own problems.

Furthermore, The Caspian Sea Convention, the regional constitution of the Caspian Sea, provides a proven legal framework for dispute settlement and create cooperation among Caspian Sea states, greatly reducing regional tensions. The Convention also provides a

number of methods for resolving conflicts between countries[11], such as: countries first set aside disputes and actively seek points where cooperation can be reached, large countries voluntarily sacrifice part of their own interests in cooperation to better attract small countries to participate in cooperation. And It has built up a model of restraint and accumulation of trust in the process of cooperation, so that will cleverly not do harm to all the interests of all parties under the rule.

5. CONCLUSION

The game and successful resolution of the Caspian Sea delimitation issue fully demonstrate the competition and cooperation in international politics. The five littoral states have shifted from the competition for strategic locations and oil and other resources in the Caspian Sea to the compromise of respecting each other's interests, which is the result of all parties actively looking for points of cooperation, making some concessions, restraining and accumulating trust, and using the rules. The signing of the Caspian Sea Convention has had a positive impact on the littoral states and countries with certain economic interests in the Caspian Sea, but it has also dealt a blow to countries such as the United States and the West, which are eager to interfere with other countries to maximize their own interests. And it is also a model for dealing with conflicts of interest between countries, which is worth learning from. At the same time, it is necessary to constantly make up for the shortcomings of the convention in order to consolidate the results of cooperation.

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