

Iran and Russia may establish joint Navy in Caspian Sea

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Iran will join a Russian-proposed joint naval task force in the Caspian region only after the legal status of the Caspian Sea has been determined, an Iranian analyst said on Monday.

Moscow proposed setting up a joint naval force of Caspian Sea countries, to be named CasFor, in October 2005. According to the proposal, the five littoral states – Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan – will join efforts to prevent terrorism and trafficking in arms, narcotics and weapons of mass destruction in the Caspian Sea.

“It is necessary to determine the legal status of the Caspian Sea before successfully implementing the CasFor project,” said Abbas Maleki, head of the International Institute for Caspian Studies in Tehran.

Leaders of the five Caspian states are expected to gather on October 16 for a summit in the Iranian capital to discuss how best to divide the resource-rich sea bed.

“If the [Caspian] sea is divided between the five coastal countries, Iran will no longer share a border with Russia and participation in a joint military grouping would be senseless for Tehran,” the analyst said.

“However, if the sides agree to continue the joint exploration of the Caspian Sea, Tehran would support creating CasFor to combat terrorism, drug-trafficking, and smuggling, and to conduct joint sea rescue operations,” Maliki said.

The Iranian expert ruled out the participation of other countries, including the United States or Europe, in the proposed security grouping, but said cooperation under the project could be coordinated within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or other existing security structures in Central Asia.

The International Institute for Caspian Studies is a non-governmental research and consultancy institute based in Tehran, which focuses on undertaking and promoting studies on political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and legal issues of the Caspian region.

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