

Putin: Russian Military to Remain in Caspian Sea Despite Region's Unease

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Russian President Vladimir Putin said the Russian military would continue to use the Caspian Sea to launch attacks against Islamic State “for as long as necessary,” despite the concerns of former Soviet republics in the region, the Kremlin press office reported Monday.

The Russian president, who was in Iran on Monday at the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, met with Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov on the sidelines of the Tehran gathering that largely focused on the Syrian crisis.

Berdymukhammedov expressed a degree of anxiety about Russia's military activities in the Caspian – though attributed the concerns to another former Soviet republic in the region, Kazakhstan.

“Our Kazakh colleagues are very much concerned by the issues that are taking place above the Caspian Sea,” Berdymukhammedov said, according to a transcript released by the Kremlin. “This is connected with military issues.”

Russian warships launched 26 rockets at Islamic State in Syria from the Caspian Sea last month, hitting their targets, according to the Defense Ministry.

Putin said he appreciated the concerns, but would stay the course until Moscow punishes those responsible for the downing of a Russian passenger airplane over Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the Oct. 31 attack.

“As for the concerns of our friends in the region about the use of the airspace over the Caspian Sea, our Kazakh friends have not told us anything about this yet, but we will keep it in mind,” Putin told the Turkmen president.

“But having the tragic experience connected with the perishing of our airplane, we will continue doing this for as long as we consider necessary to punish those responsible,” Putin said.

Putin also told Berdymukhammedov the Islamic State terrorist organization presents a threat to every country, and suggested that former Soviet republics should appreciate the effort and expenses Russia is putting into fighting the common enemy.

“We understand that, perhaps, there are some restrictions and that a certain discomfort is created, but you and I understand that all the efforts that Russia is making to fight terrorism, fall as a burden primarily on the Russian Federation — and I am referring even to the material aspect,” Putin said.

“Meanwhile, terrorist organizations, such as the so-called Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra and others, don't spare anybody,” he said.

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