

The Caspian Sea and the Return of Classical Maritime Strategy

Demetrios Tsailas (ret Admiral)

(He has taught for many years, operational planning, strategy, and security, to senior officers at the Supreme Joint War College. He is a member and researcher of the Institute for National and International Security)

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Major strategic transformations rarely become apparent while they are unfolding. More often, they develop quietly, away from the world's principal theaters of conflict, until a single event reveals that geography has already reshaped the logic of war. That is precisely what is happening today in the Caspian Sea.

Although international attention remains focused on the Black Sea, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Red Sea, the Caspian is quietly emerging as one of Eurasia's most consequential geostrategic hubs. No longer merely an enclosed energy basin, it is becoming the critical connective corridor between two conflicts that have largely been treated as separate: the war in Ukraine and the broader confrontation involving Iran, Israel, and the United States.

This transformation reinforces one of the oldest principles of strategic thought. Thucydides argued that geography is not simply the stage upon which history unfolds but a determining factor in the distribution of power among states. In the twenty-first century, that insight has acquired renewed relevance. Geography is no longer defined solely by territory or political borders. Increasingly, it is determined by control over the networks through which power flows: sea lines of communication (SLOCs), energy corridors, digital infrastructure, and global supply chains.

The Caspian Sea has become one of those networks.

Today, it functions as a secure internal line of communication linking Russia and Iran, enabling the movement of military equipment, industrial components, technology, and energy investments beyond the reach of many external pressures. Russian-Iranian cooperation is therefore no longer sustained merely by diplomatic alignment or a shared opposition to the West. It increasingly rests upon an integrated logistical and industrial partnership, with the Caspian serving as its indispensable backbone.

This strategic reality also helps explain Ukraine's growing interest in projecting pressure beyond the Black Sea. Strikes against vessels and infrastructure supporting Russian-Iranian logistics are intended not simply to destroy assets but to disrupt the strategic sustainment of Russia's war effort. Clausewitz observed that victory depends upon attacking the enemy's center of gravity. In contemporary warfare, however, that center of gravity is often neither an army nor a capital city. It is the network that enables military, industrial, and economic power to endure over time.

The developments in the Caspian equally reaffirm the enduring relevance of Sir Julian Corbett's maritime theory. Corbett maintained that the essence of sea power lies less in destroying an adversary's fleet than in controlling the maritime communications upon which national power depends. The competition now unfolding in the Caspian reflects precisely this logic. The contest is not over maritime territory itself but over preserving—or denying—the uninterrupted flow of people, information, technology, and military supplies.

Alfred Thayer Mahan's ideas also deserve renewed attention, albeit in a contemporary context. Mahan associated national power with command of maritime commerce and oceanic communications. Today, that concept extends beyond the world's great oceans. Even an enclosed body of water such as the Caspian can exert global strategic influence when it constitutes an irreplaceable link in an international logistics network. Maritime power is therefore measured not only by the size of a navy but also by a state's capacity to secure the networks that sustain its economic resilience and military effectiveness.

Viewed from a broader perspective, the Caspian is part of a much larger strategic system. The Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Eastern Mediterranean should no longer be regarded as separate geopolitical spaces. They increasingly form a single Eurasian maritime system in which disruptions in one theater rapidly affect the others through shipping, energy markets, and interconnected supply chains.

For Greece, this is not an abstract strategic debate. As one of the world's foremost maritime nations and Europe's leading shipping power, Greece's prosperity depends upon the security of international sea lines of communication. The Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean form integral components of the same strategic continuum stretching from the Black Sea to the Indian Ocean. Safeguarding freedom of navigation, protecting the global maritime commons, and strengthening the resilience of critical supply chains are therefore not simply matters of international law; they are essential elements of national power.

The broader lesson is unmistakable. Future wars are unlikely to be decided solely by technological superiority or advanced weapons systems. Instead, success will increasingly depend upon the ability of states to secure maritime communications, protect critical infrastructure, and preserve the resilience of the logistical networks that sustain military operations and economic stability.

The Caspian Sea has become one of the clearest examples of this strategic transition. Once viewed primarily as a regional energy basin, it is rapidly evolving into a geopolitical crossroads where maritime strategy, geoeconomics, military logistics, and grand strategy converge. Those who continue to interpret the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East as isolated conflicts may be viewing contemporary geopolitics through an outdated strategic lens.

In the twenty-first century, wars are connected through the maritime arteries that sustain the global economy. As Thucydides, Mahan, Corbett, and Clausewitz each demonstrated in different ways, strategic initiative ultimately belongs not to the state

possessing the greatest firepower, but to the one that best understands the enduring relationship between geography, maritime power, and political purpose.

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