



Image credit: NASA

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# Lifeboats Over the Caspian Sea

The International Space Station was passing over Turkmenistan on July 26, 2015 when a crewmember shot this image of the southern extent of the Caspian Sea. The brilliant concentration of light at dead center, set somewhat inland from the coast, is the capital city of Iran - Tehran. Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, is the bright area protruding into the Caspian in the lower right third of the image.

Standing by reassuringly are two Russian Soyuz spacecraft, the only means of arrival and departure currently available to astronauts on board the ISS. Each capsule is capable of transporting 3 crewmembers safely back to Earth, on short notice if necessary.

While the Soyuz and US capsule systems from the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs all incorporated parachutes in the final descent phase, the US vehicles were designed to splashdown in the Pacific Ocean, while the Russian vehicle touches down on the wide open plains of the Kazakhstan Steppe. Two small engines on the bottom of the Soyuz capsule ignite just one second prior to contact with the ground to help reduce the bone-rattling g-load of impact.

