Recent discussions on Middle Eastern security have highlighted the emergence of a *New Middle East*, inspired first, to a certain extent at least, by Shimon Peres’s usage of the concept to designate the region as a place where cooperation could replace political competition.\(^1\) In fact, in the post–Cold War world the nomenclature of international politics as well as its conceptual patterns and definitive notions have been transformed; words like *region* and *frontier* have taken on new shades of meaning. It is to be expected that these transformations are reflected in the Middle East and that interpretations will differ when one attempts to describe the new characteristics of the region.

There are certain factors and processes that lead to some optimistic evaluations of Middle Eastern security. The foremost development that suggests a new and more secure Middle East is the Arab-Israeli peace process. Depending upon the degree of rapprochement between Israel and some of its opponents in the Arab world, some analysts foresee a peaceful future for the region. Considering the gradual integration of Israel into the region—its evolution from a geocultural and then a geopolitical alien to a recognized regional entity—prospects for normalized, nonhostile strategic relationships may seem possible. In fact, for a short period of time, the Madrid and Oslo summits reinforced this inclination toward optimism. However, two factors make this prospect unrealistic. One is the negative developments that have occurred in the peace process, especially the tenure of Benjamin Netanyahu.

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in Israel and the lack of support he gave to the peace process during his
government. His successor, Ehud Barak, could not successfully restart the
peace process, and such a turn does not seem possible under Ariel Sharon,
who is considered a war criminal by the Arab world. The continuation of
Israeli settlement policies and the delay of withdrawal from the West Bank
have prevented expectations of peace from being fulfilled.

The other factor making optimistic predictions for the peace process unre-
realistic is the falsity of using the process itself as the central criterion and the
ultimate condition for security in the Middle East. The perceived centrality
of the peace process creates a false impression that the settlement of Arab-
Israeli problems represents the end of chronic insecurity in the region.
Although peaceful resolution of problems between Israel and its neighbor-
ing Arab countries is one of the most important conditions for enhanced
security, there are many other dynamics and strategic trends that define
security in the region. Middle East politics are characterized by a large
number of territorial disputes, ethnic and religious clashes, intra-Arab prob-
lems, civil wars, and intense competition for oil and water. There will be
major variables defining the future of security in the region even if the Arab-
Israeli peace process ends with real success.

Economic and development trends in the Middle Eastern countries also
contribute to the optimistic accounts of security in the region. Moderniza-
tion, increasing levels of literacy, better education conditions, and some ten-
dency toward political reform and relative liberalization of economics in
varying degree in different countries imply a promising picture of security.
Paradoxically, these developments themselves may create a situation that
would be just the opposite of what these optimistic accounts expect from
them, for at least some of the positive indicators contain within themselves
inherent destabilizing effects. Given the fact that many of the Middle East-
ern regimes lack a genuine basis of political legitimacy, these reformist
trends may further erode their stability and the existing balances within
their polities. Increased literacy and education open new channels and more
informed attitudes for questioning political structures. A variety of disturb-
ing prospects, then, confront both regional actors and extraregional powers
like the United States, especially at a time when these indigenous regimes
try to emphasize their state-national identities and preserve their separate-
ness in strategic calculations. Neither regional countries nor the United States have the courage and intention to cope with a potential crisis that would emanate from demands for political reform in the oil-rich Middle Eastern states. Thus, these developmental processes depict a pessimistic picture for the future of security in the region.

In addition, post–Cold War conditions in international politics bear important implications for armament-proliferation trends. The fading out of patron-client relations between Russia and its local proxies left such countries as Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Algeria on their own in security matters. The need for a more powerful indigenous military force has increased, making arms buildups the preferred route to improving domestic capabilities. Moreover, with the diminution of strategic alternatives like the nonalignment movement or dependence on Soviet backing, the possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) has become the preferred way to enhance the regional and international position of local countries. In the post–Cold War world, WMD capability is seen to be the most influential vehicle for achieving international prestige, assertiveness, and attention. The search for strategic weight has driven many countries to the fringes of WMD proliferation. The rise in the number of surface-to-surface ballistic missiles in the region is a sign of potentially more severe casualties in possible future military clashes. Increased militarization and WMD proliferation will continue to be decisive factors in regional security, and some kind of a “catching-up” arms race will be an important component in regional security projections.

Regional security endeavors here include both self-help behaviors informed by an anarchical logic and some collective security arrangements. It should be noted here that, despite a few, limited collective initiatives in the region, Middle Eastern countries lack a true commitment to institutionalized security arrangements. The reluctance of regional actors for formal commitments and for common security institutions is readily apparent. Although the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League are important forums for discussions of security-related matters and security-related diplomacy, they can-

not play decisive roles in conflict resolution. Instead of formal relationships, informal security activities are on the rise in the region, especially in the form of joint military maneuvers with nonregional actors such as the United States and U.S. military presence in various local countries.

The most important factor to give rise to the New Middle East is Central Asia’s emergence. During the Cold War, arbitrary delimitation and territorial conceptualization dominated much of strategic thinking. The Caucasus, eastern Anatolia, and the Persian Gulf, for example, were treated as different territories and regions. However, with the Cold War over, “to conceptualize Central Asia and the Middle East as distinctive regions is to allow this past 70 years [of Soviet rule] to set the parameters on our understanding today.”

The end of the Cold War changed the ways people perceived these regions, and studies began to focus on the historical and geopolitical contingencies that unite these disparate geographies. The political and cognitive geography of the Middle East, together with its constituent subregional zones like the Persian Gulf, are now much wider than its real and physical geography. This is the critical feature of the Middle Eastern security framework.

The geo-economic ties characterizing the Middle East also are relevant to appreciating the Middle East as a geopolitical space. Most of the countries in the region, especially the Persian Gulf states, have economies that are fiscally dependent on the parameters of a transregional market—the international oil market. Any crisis related to oil in the region will eventually affect this global market and vice versa. Consequently, the dynamic spatiality of the Middle Eastern regional system exceeds the physical limitations of the Middle East, and looking at the region in broader terms becomes inevitable when depicting a security framework for the region. In this essay I aim to analyze the impact of the Caspian region on Middle East security within the framework of the emergence of the New Middle East. I deal with the input of Caspian republics to a new security structure, the impact of potential Caspian resource wealth, and the changing nature of Russian security as well as WMD and Islamic fundamentalism, all of which are related to the Caspian region’s emergence as a subregion within the new enlarged Middle East.

The Emergence of the Caspian

The new republics of the Caspian region are likely to play important roles in the geopolitics of the enlarged Middle East. The main basis of the foreign policy of Turkmenistan is Achik Gapilar Siyasatı (Open Doors Policy), which aims to stimulate foreign economic relations. Turkmenistan has revised its legal framework to assist foreign investment, including duty-free entry provisions, and has tried to eliminate cultural, religious, and ethnic factors in shaping its foreign policy. Turkmen foreign-policy makers have emphasized maintaining stability, following the strategies of neutrality in foreign policy and an outline of ten years of stability in domestic affairs.5

Turkmen leaders perceive their country as being located in a very critical region. Turkmen oil and gas reserves have attracted major global and regional interests, and such actors have sought ways to exercise influence. Turkmenistan has major weaknesses, such as a low population, lack of military power, and the absence of industrial infrastructure. It was in light of potential external influences and these internal weaknesses that Turkmen leadership adopted a status of neutrality.6 Following Turkmenistan’s participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution relating to the permanent neutrality of Turkmenistan by unanimous vote on 27 December 1995.7

Turkmenistan’s neutrality has not created an obstacle to its participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s Partnership for Peace program. It became the first Central Asian country to join the program, declaring that its cooperation did not contradict its status of neutrality since the program is based on respect for other countries’ security and was aimed to provide help for the solution of conflicts in the region.8 NATO officials noted that this relationship is similar to those with other neutral countries, such as Switzerland and Austria.9 However, Turkmenistan’s military cooperation is not restricted

6. Turkmenistan’s president, Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, underlined these factors as the reason to declare neutrality in a United Nations speech on 22 October 1995, Quoted in Permanent Neutrality of Turkmenistan (Asghabat: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, 1998), 9.
to NATO, as it has signed bilateral military agreements with Russia and sent military personnel to Turkey, Pakistan, and Ukraine for training. Turkmenistan pursues special military relations with Russia, in particular for the purpose of the joint defense of their border.\footnote{The crisis in Tajikistan and the Afghan civil war became test cases for Turkmen neutrality. The opposing forces in these crises have met on separate occasions in Ashgabat in an effort to achieve peace. Turkmenistan has thus become an appropriate country to offer mediation for regional conflicts.}

In Kazakhstan, ethnic Russians make up 45 percent of the total population. This is an important factor in Kazakh foreign policy. Though Kazakhstan has opened its doors to Western investors, it is still very much dependent on Russian pipeline routes, and there are other economic and political dependencies. Kazakhstan’s main issues in terms of regional security are its struggle to overcome the difficulties arising from dependence on Russia, its legacy as a nuclear weapons state, and its need to find means to transport oil to world markets.

The foreign ministry of Kazakhstan closely follows the developments relating to nuclear and other WMD. As a former site of nuclear weapons and space technology development, Kazakhstan had a large number of experts who were of close interest to certain Middle Eastern states. Ethnic Russians who used to work for these industries for the most part moved to the Russian Federation. A limited number found employment in the United States, Europe, East Asia, and oil-rich Arab countries. There is always the potential for the transfer of nuclear technology to the so-called rogue states of the Middle East—Syria, Iraq, and Iran—from the Russian Federation or Kazakhstan.

As one foreign policy official indicated, the Kazakh leadership will not close the option of a pipeline through Iran.\footnote{See Turkmenistan News Weekly, 31 May 1999.} In the short run, the Iranian communication and transportation routes constitute a viable option for carrying Kazakh oil to world markets. In addition, the Kazakh government uses its Iranian connection as leverage in its relationship with the United States.

\footnotetext{10. Gradually, the number of Russian units has been reduced. In 1999 it consisted of three hundred officers. See Turkmenistan News Weekly, 31 May 1999.}

\footnotetext{11. Personal interview with an international law expert working for foreign ministry of Kazakhstan, Istanbul, 24 August 1999.}
in order to get concessions for financing alternative pipelines. In this regard, any policy that would bring Kazakhstan closer to the Iran-Russia axis would be detrimental to Western interests and pro-Western countries of the region.

Azerbaijan has shown the greatest propensity among the Caspian states to become involved in the geopolitical jockeying of the enlarged Middle East. Baku would like to be part of the pro-Western grouping in the Middle East. It has also joined in a regional constellation including Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Moldova to counter Russian influence in the area. In addition, Baku has invited global powers to invest in oil extraction schemes. In all of their policies, Azerbaijani leaders aim to counter attempts at developing a Russian-Armenian-Iranian axis and to find means to free their land occupied by Armenian forces.

The reaction after Israeli prime minister Netanyahu’s visit to Baku indicated the nature of Azerbaijan’s role in the new geopolitics of the region. Iran state radio the next day blasted Azerbaijan for hosting the prime minister, saying, “Baku has been playing a dangerous game by receiving the Zionist regime’s expansionist prime minister. By doing this it has destabilized its own ties with Islamic states in the region and the world.”12 Armenian foreign minister Alexander Arzumanyan also considered close cooperation between Turkey and Israel to be extremely dangerous for the region, saying that it would be even worse should Azerbaijan join such a grouping. He underlined the importance of Tehran-Yerevan ties at a time when regional cooperation was rapidly expanding.13 Azerbaijan clearly hopes Israel will firm up its partnership with Turkey and Baku in order to secure political support and economic assistance.

Azerbaijan’s other main concern is to avoid trouble that could originate in Moscow. Speculation about a Russian hand behind the coup attempts against President Haydar Aliyev shows that early Russian perceptions that Aliyev was pro-Russian were erroneous. Azerbaijan rather quickly established a balanced relationship with regional countries and subsequently a pro-Western attitude in its foreign policy. Azerbaijan’s potential oil riches also attracted investment from China and Japan, although not as much as

from Western countries. The future of its strategy is tied to Western investors’ ability and willingness to continue to invest, to help Baku escape from its perceived sense of encirclement by Russia, Armenia, and Iran, and to help it find an acceptable solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. This will also help determine the duration of the pro-Western stance of Baku.

Armenia, in an effort to come closer to pro-Western countries, has shown some degree of willingness to normalize its relations with Turkey and to distance itself from Iran. During a visit to Israel, President Robert Kocharian and Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian pointed out that Armenia’s relationships with Iran and Syria should be balanced by establishing links with Israel. Kocharian argued as well that the active relations of Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan with Israel have contributed to Armenia’s isolation in the southern Caucasus, underscoring the need for Yerevan in its own national interest to initiate a policy of complementarity. Armenia also has looked warily at the initiative for a southern Caucasus regional stability pact proposed by Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.14

When world oil prices fell steadily from November 1997 to December 1998, the importance of the Caspian oil was significantly diminished.15 Oil reserves looked increasingly vulnerable with oil prices around $10 per barrels, in view of the $7 per barrel transport cost involved in moving this oil to the Black Sea. Many analysts argued that prices would remain low for several years if not longer. If true, such low prices would force changes in behavior with implications for private companies, national oil companies, and markets generally. An obvious solution for producing governments, a trend already under way before the recent price crisis, would be to allow foreign companies access to develop reserves. Private companies would generate greater revenues more quickly and at lower prices. However, the prediction that prices would remain low did not prove true. In the first nine months of 1998 crude oil pieces grew by an astonishing 150 percent, or $15 per barrel.

15. Among the factors that precipitated the sharp decline in crude oil prices were OPEC’s decision to increase oil production ceilings, the reemergence of Iraqi oil, the Asian currency crisis, and unusually mild weather.
Though estimates differ, the Caspian region is believed to contain oil reserves in the range of 30 billion to 40 billion barrels. Some analysts estimate that potential reserves could bring the total to over 200 billion barrels. In April 1998, during heated debates concerning various possible routes of pipelines, the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) released a report questioning the estimated figures of oil deposits. The IISS experts argued that the projected 200 billion barrels of oil deposits, as suggested by the U.S. Department of Energy, was an exaggeration. They suggested, instead, that the Caspian region’s oil deposits are in the range of between 25 billion to 35 billion barrels, comparable to North Sea oil reserves.16 This amount would represent a new source of non-OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil production and thus could eventually become a threat to Persian Gulf oil. New prices and investment policies would be needed to protect the gulf’s share from newcomers, whether from the Caspian Sea or from any other sources.

There are also series of complicated technical, economic, logistical, geopolitical, and social obstacles in the way of rapid development of Caspian oil reserves. However, the existence of reserves other than those in the Persian Gulf means that a high-price strategy may not be sustainable for gulf producers. Economists at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development prepared a study that indicates that proven oil reserves in the Caspian Basin amount to about 3 percent of total world resources. It also asserts that the region contains about 7 percent of world reserves of natural gas. In their view, the Caspian region could bridge any resulting energy gap if war or other kinds of turmoil should interrupt Middle East supply.17

Since the beginning of the debate over how to carry the reserves of the Caspian Basin to world markets, the idea of transporting oil through Iran has been kept alive and has found supporters from different parties to the debate.18 The main reasons are the relatively good shape of Iran’s domestic

pipelines, its geographical proximity to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, and its borders on the Caspian Sea. The Iranian option would require the construction of an extra one hundred kilometers of pipeline at a cost of $350 million and would connect the Azerbaijan coast of the Caspian oil fields to existing pipelines that lie southeast of Tabriz. No international oil companies have yet begun to talk of building transit pipelines from the Caspian through Iran to the Persian Gulf.

Taking this situation into consideration, Tehran seems willing to sign more swap agreements with the countries of the Caspian Sea region. Swaps would offer an easy way both to supply northern Iran, which is far from the oil-rich southern region, and to increase Iran’s leverage on world markets, even if the Caspian Sea oil is sold on behalf of others. This would have important implications for the region, since Central Asian countries would potentially be dependent on Iranian markets and transport routes. Furthermore, this situation could increase Iran’s position and influence in the Persian Gulf. Such a trend certainly would not be desirable for the United States and its allies in the region.

The U.S. government perceives that it is deeply engaged in the security of the Persian Gulf, which has been threatened by both Iran and Iraq over the past two decades. The dual containment strategy would be very costly to manage for a very long time. The security dilemma that Washington faces in the region is very likely to increase, as new players enter the scene, connected with Caspian oil. A prerequisite for the security of the Persian Gulf is the commitment of regional states to the sovereignty of the oil-producing countries in the region. If the Iranian objective of shipping Caspian oil to the Persian Gulf is realized, then Russia and Iraq would become engaged in a new alignment to contain the increasing power of Iran in the region, which in turn would aggravate the security considerations in the region beyond their regional rivalry. On the other hand, if the Turkish option of a pipeline through the Baku-Ceyhan route is overstressed, Iran and Russia would be pushed closer together.19

19. Miles, 18.
Weapons of Mass Destruction

A number of countries in this region have nuclear weapons and/or the technology required to produce them.\(^{20}\) One may question the significance of having such weapons in this region in comparison to other areas of the world, which have the same weapons and technology, but the answer lies in the conflict-prone atmosphere of international relations of the region.\(^{21}\) Russia is a critical player with its legacy and leverage over the newly independent Central Asian republics. Reportedly, it has transferred nuclear technology and even has perhaps sold some nuclear weapons to China, India, Iran, and Iraq. This situation is a concern to all parties related to the region and has importance for global security.\(^{22}\)

The transfer of nuclear technology, the potential ecological crises related to the production of nuclear raw materials and energy, and the dangers inherent in existing stockpiles are among the main threats to a peaceful and stable Central Asia. Such considerations make the integration of the region into the global security system necessary, especially in the fields of nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament.\(^{23}\) Integration with global security initiatives and developments could provide a reliable security guarantee allowing stability and sustainable growth in the region.\(^{24}\)

Nuclear weapons free zones (NWFZs) have been attempted in Latin America and Africa. Uzbekistan proposed a similar zone for Central Asia on

\(^{20}\) WMD include nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and ballistic missiles. In terms of availability, biological and chemical weapons are easy and inexpensive to acquire compared to the higher technology and cost connected with nuclear weapons. In order to prevent proliferation of WMD, there are many conventions and international agreements. The NPT was signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970; the Anti-Ballistic Missiles Treaty was signed in 1972; the Biological Weapons Convention was signed in 1972; the Chemical Weapons Convention was signed in 1993 and entered into force in 1997; and the Missile Technology Control Regime was signed in 1987. All are crucially important international agreements. Even if the effectiveness of these conventions is debated, their importance cannot be disregarded.


10 November 1997 and received support from the other republics. Major UN members have encouraged the development of such a zone.\textsuperscript{25} The newly independent states have recognized the benefits from nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament.\textsuperscript{26} While the development of a Central Asia NWFZ would require a long and complex process, it would make a great contribution to the security and stability of the region and to global security in general.

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in late 1997 encouraging the establishment of a NWFZ in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{27} On the path to this resolution and its implementation was the Almaty Declaration of 28 February 1997, the Tashkent Statement of 15 September 1997, and the Bishkek Conference on 9 to 10 July 1998. In a message to the Bishkek conference, the UN secretary-general supported the development of a NWFZ and noted it would strengthen “peace and stability at both the regional and global levels and is in the interests of the security of the States in the Central Asian region.”\textsuperscript{28}

In the Tashkent Statement, five Central Asian states declared that the establishment of such a zone was an essential element for regional security. They also called on the permanent members of the UN Security Council to support the initiative. They appealed to other states “to give assistance to the rehabilitation of lands, especially those contaminated by radioactive wastes,” in order to provide environmental security for the region. The five states emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation in the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. They also requested “the UN specialized agencies to set up a group of experts from the regional group to examine forms and elements for the preparation and implementation of a treaty on the establishment in Central Asia of a zone free of nuclear weapons.”\textsuperscript{29}


\textsuperscript{26} Kamilov, 94.


The security of Russia is certainly critical for the Caspian region and Central Asia as well as for global security. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, huge amounts of nuclear stockpiles and related materials required safe and efficient monitoring and control. This issue became one of the main concerns of the newly independent Central Asian republics and the states surrounding the Caspian region as well as for the world in general. Lack of qualified personnel and equipment to monitor nuclear safeguards, inadequate control mechanisms, lack of ethics in the arms industry, and black market opportunities were the main obstacles to securing the nuclear elements in Russia.30

Russia needed financial assistance to overcome these challenges as well as to cope with its overall economic crisis. Otherwise, both the region and the world at large could have been under nuclear threat. The situation could likely worsen, since Russia has not proven itself capable of controlling its excessively large and burdensome nuclear capabilities. Clearly, it is in the interest of all concerned that Moscow should attempt to limit and decrease its nuclear weapons capability.31

In the long run, Russia can be expected to remain a nuclear state for several reasons. First, Russia’s economic conditions underlie its strategy of having nuclear weapons instead of high-cost conventional weapons. Events in the Kosovo conflict showed that Russia cannot reach the level of powerful conventional weapons enjoyed by members of NATO. The instability to the south of Russia and likely future threats from this region motivated Russia to continue its reliance on nuclear weapons. Second, foreign policy considerations also provide incentives for Russia to continue to be a nuclear state. Third, the notion of prestige and sense of great-power status also constitute reasons to justify such a course for Russia.32

Decision-making structures in Russia are also critical for the nuclear security of Central Asia and the West. Decisions on the uses of nuclear

weapons are mostly made by the military itself. The lack of adequate parliamentary control over the military shows that there is a great deal of potential risk involved. In addition to these Russian issues, there is also the need to have coordination among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on the issue of nuclear weapons. Western assistance is necessary for the effective monitoring of nuclear safeguards and limits on Russian nuclear assets. Such issues also arise relating to the deployment of Russian nuclear submarines. Due to Russia’s technical and economic difficulties, the absence of Western assistance would raise even more questions. There is no guarantee that Russian nuclear stockpiles are secure from theft or other diversions outside the federation.

A further development concerning nuclear weapons, also critically important for the security of Central Asia, is Russia’s new national security concept. The 1999 draft military-doctrine document makes the use of the nuclear weapons easier even in the case of small-scale wars and internal conflict that could threaten Russian’s national security. According to Nikolai Sokov, the change reflects a realistic appreciation that Russia’s weakened conventional forces would be unable to resist a large-scale conventional attack by NATO. The 1999 doctrine also facilitates the use of nuclear weapons as a lever over internal opponents and foreign actors. In comparison, Russia’s military doctrine of 1993 was less explicit about the potential uses of nuclear weapons. The 1999 draft also provided for the use of nuclear weapons in any attack against Russia, as well as the use of chemical or biological weapons.

The possible export of Russian nuclear weapons or the transfer of Russian nuclear technology abroad are other important security matters and concern the proliferation of WMD. Since 1991, Russia has accelerated the

export of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons due to financial needs.\textsuperscript{38} Moscow’s export policy is based on “the laissez faire principle of exporting weapons to whomever can pay regardless of the recipient’s ideology or other political considerations.”\textsuperscript{39}

“The continuing erosion of the central authority and the privatization of the state, acquisition of control over nuclear, biological, and chemical materials and missiles by criminal elements, the failure of military reform and the emergence of a foreign challenge that obligates Russia to sell systems abroad” are factors that lead Russia into “further proliferation adventures.”\textsuperscript{40} Russia also provides technical assistance in the field of nuclear technology and WMD to China, India, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Sudan,\textsuperscript{41} and there is a Russian intention to help establish nuclear-energy-generating stations in India and Iran.\textsuperscript{42} The transfer of Russian nuclear technology to Iran greatly worries Israel, which must include this threat in security calculations and assessments of the balance of power in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{43} In March 2001, during the visit of Iranian president Mohammed Khatami to Moscow, this issue was at the top of the agenda.

Besides export issues, possible illicit nuclear trafficking creates another dimension of threat in Russia and its neighboring regions, including Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Balkans. Agreements exist among the CIS countries to exchange information on illegal nuclear trafficking, though cooperation between police organizations is weak.\textsuperscript{44} The strengthening of such cooperation is necessary. Because of its geographical location, Turkey is a very critical country in efforts to halt such potential nuclear smuggling. Eighteen nuclear trafficking incidents involving Turkey were reported between 1993 and 1999, although Turkish officials denied publicly that any plutonium or highly enriched uranium had been

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Gerald Steinberg, “U.S. Responses to Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East,” \textit{Middle East Review of International Affairs} 2, no. 3 (1998).
seized in the country.\textsuperscript{45} The cases reportedly included nuclear material seized in Turkey, material en route to Turkey, and material seized involving a Turkish national. Effective control over nuclear trafficking from the former Soviet Union passing through Turkey to the Balkans and Middle East requires more careful attention from the side of Turkey. A related problem is that 75 percent of the world’s illicit opium production comes from Afghanistan through Central Asia with limited border guards and ineffectual checkpoints.

Analyzing the issue of WMD at a regional level for the Caspian region also necessitates looking at the U.S. view. The United States closely follows developments related to proliferation of WMD as well as international terrorism and has a self-assigned catalyst role in eliminating this threat.\textsuperscript{46} The states of particular concern to the United States include Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. The United States continues to preserve its own nuclear weapons and other WMD, although some in the United States support elimination of all nuclear weapons and reliance on conventional weapons.

The role of the United States is vital for monitoring the nuclear weapons issue in the enlarged Middle East. The U.S.-Russia partnership to limit nuclear assets continues. The ratification of START II, negotiations of START III, and amendment of the ABM Treaty are important agenda issues for the two powers. In summer 1999 Secretary of State Madeleine Albright paid a visit to Russia and reached an agreement on a joint statement concerning strategic offensive and defensive arms and further strengthening stability. In that statement, the two sides recalled their concern about the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery, including missiles and missile technologies.\textsuperscript{47}

U.S. cooperation with Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan to control and eliminate nuclear weapons is another significant development for the security of the Caspian region and its neighbors. A cooperative threat-reduction program is aimed at improving border controls, safeguarding nuclear mat-


erials, and monitoring technology related to WMD. The United States has also supported the dismantling of Kazakhstan’s nuclear arsenal through the Nunn-Lugar program.

Despite the U.S. emphasis on dealing with the threat of WMD and its assistance to Russia and the Central Asian republics, some have criticized Washington’s allegedly weak policy on Russian WMD sales to the Middle East and Southern Asia and the Russian transfer of nuclear technology to Iran, which received serious objection from Israel.

India and Pakistan are two threshold states that have nuclear weapons but have not yet signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. India has tried to develop its nuclear facilities further with help from Russia. South Asia also may have biological and chemical weapons as well as missile delivery vehicles. The 1998 nuclear tests in India and Pakistan attracted global attention. Undoubtedly a peaceful and secure Southern Asia would make a considerable contribution to peace, security, and stability in the enlarged Middle East. A nonproliferation policy for Southern Asia not only depends on India and Pakistan but also on a delicate balancing of interests among those two countries and China, the United States, and others. International economic sanctions on India and Pakistan relating to their nuclear tests have not produced an effective solution.

**Israeli Involvement in the Caspian Region**

Israeli foreign policy makers have attached special importance to developing relations with the Caspian states. The Israeli attempts found a receptive

49. Ibid.
50. Gerald Steinberg, “U.S. Responses to Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 3 (1998); Efraim Inbar, “Israel Strategy,” in ibid.
54. Gizewski, 288.
audience, given Caspian geography and the importance attached by Caspian leaders to developing relations with Israel. This attitude is shared by Israeli leaders. For example, Prime Minister Netanyahu, on his way back to Israel from a visit to Japan and South Korea, stopped briefly in Baku and met with Aliyev in 1997. Netanyahu noted how much these two states have in common:

We are two ancient peoples who have achieved independence in the last decades, and now the task for us as independent nations is to continue to develop our countries. . . . I also find great hope in the fact that we have a relationship as we do with Turkey, with Jordan, with Egypt, between the Jewish state and predominantly Muslim states. . . . This gives us hope that all the children of Abraham can find peace and friendship under the same sun that rises over the Caspian Sea and sets over the Mediterranean.  

Aliyev said Azerbaijan wanted to tap Israeli technological expertise. Netanyahu reiterated his concern about possible sales of nuclear technology to his country’s arch foe, Iran, which shares a long land and sea border with Azerbaijan. Netanyahu also described Azerbaijan as a potential supplier of oil to Israel and emphasized a pipeline project that would enable Azerbaijan to move its crude oil across neighboring Georgia and Turkey to the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea and a prospective underwater extension to Israel. Netanyahu said, “We are involved in this project. . . . It will enable us to buy oil at a much lower price.”

Netanyahu evidently discussed the feasibility of three-sided cooperation among Israel, Turkey, and Azerbaijan to confront the perceived threat of Islamic fanaticism emanating from Iran. Shimon Stein, the deputy director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry department for the CIS and Central Europe, said during a visit to Baku in January 1999 that the potential exists for developing economic links between Azerbaijan and Israel. He noted that Israel supports the Baku-Ceyhan route for the main oil pipeline, as it was

advantageous for the entire Transcaucasia both from an economic and strategic angle. The project would put an end to Azerbaijan’s dependence on other countries. Of note is that President Aliyev had chosen the Israeli aircraft industry to modernize his Topolev presidential aircraft and had invited Turkish and Israeli security experts to train his private security guard units.

The situation is very much the same in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. On 25 May 1995, Turkmen leader Niyazov traveled to Israel, where he met with Israeli president Ezer Weizman as well as with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres for talks focusing on bilateral economic relations. Israel is involved in a $100 million irrigation project and a scheme to build a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey. Executives at Merhav, an Israeli company with investments in Turkmenistan, believe it is possible for the pipeline to be extended to Israel. Kazakhstan has welcomed the positive developments in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The Kazakh foreign ministry issued a statement declaring, “positive changes in the Middle East leading to the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict should become irreversible in the interests of establishing mutual confidence, developing broad economic cooperation in the region and creating an integral security system in Asia.” Kazak leader Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Israel in December 1995. During talks held with the Israeli foreign minister, he said that they “share Israel’s stand on the Iranian issue and work to prevent Iranian influence in Kazakhstan.” It is likely that both countries will continue to improve relations between Kazakhstan and Israel.

**Islamic Fundamentalism**

The geographic proximity of the Muslim Middle Eastern states to the Caspian region has strengthened the idea of a possible fundamentalist threat
in the area. This potential threat has become a controversial issue in the minds of experts and policy makers. Western analysts, with few exceptions, have failed to recognize the difference between the religion of Islam and fundamentalist movements based on alleged Islamic ideas. Often these two are considered the same thing.

In the Soviet Union, “because the exclusivist nature of the Marxist-Leninist ideology that guided the Soviet leadership left no room for ideological, political or cultural pluralism, religion—recognized as a major hindrance to social engineering—became the target of a long series of anti-religious and atheistic campaigns.” The USSR disapproved not only of Islam but of all religious activities. Yet Islam survived in Central Asia: “Sometimes it gained secret support from local Muslim administrators despite the pressure of the central authority.”

Since the collapse of the communist system, the search for identity has been a main concern of the regional states. They have been faced with the options of choosing the dominant Russian identity, creating their own nationalism, or seeking refuge in religion. Although Russian influence is not encouraged by the West, its alternatives are problematic because of possible undesirable outcomes. Religion is generally open to debate because of the fear of fundamentalism. Central Asia is in a process of nation building and reconstruction, and the nearby Middle East region and its potential influence attracts considerable attention.

Saudi Arabia is particularly active in Central Asia, and Saudi influence in the region has existed since the late Soviet period. Saudi Arabia has financed the construction of mosques, religious schools, and institutions for Islamic diffusion and with the aim of reviving Islamic consciousness throughout the region. However, due to its Wahhabi identity, it is hard to argue that Saudi Arabia has found a receptive audience in the region. To many, the Wahhabi movement seems distant from mainstream Islam.

Pakistan and Afghanistan also have close relations with Central Asia due


to their geographical proximity. Iran, however, has attracted more attention than these two states, since it is one of the most economically advanced states of the wider region and often offers a gateway to world markets. Although Iran’s Islamic government is more democratic than Saudi Arabia’s, Iran has less sympathy in Western circles. If one excludes the limited influence of a warring faction in Tajikistan, however, Iran has not targeted the Islamization of the region. Iranian administrators are wise enough to recognize that authoritarian state models for the newly independent states would not tolerate any foreign involvement.

Turkey is one of the important regional actors. Its historical links, identity, and culture tie it closely to the Central Asian countries. These features have paved the way for the development of relations with the region, although Turkey is geographically in a disadvantageous position compared to Russia and Iran. Since the Soviet dissolution, Turkey is seen by many in the Western media as a model for the newly independent countries. Turkey’s secular, democratic structure along with its Islamic identity, they note, makes it a good example for countries in search of a new identity. Nearly ten thousand students from Central Asian countries have earned their high school and university degrees in Turkey. Also, nongovernmental organizations from Turkey have established more than 130 schools in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet system. These education and other activities in Central Asia make Turkey important in the region’s future and should diminish a possible fundamentalist threat.

Conclusion

Thanks to their oil and gas reserves, the Caspian states have suddenly become of interest to Western news media, which have carried frequent reports on oil fields, pipeline projects, or various scenarios of ethnic conflicts that may affect the region. Articles have informed readers about how rich a newly discovered field was, which company got how much share in a newly formed consortium, or which pipeline route would have destabilizing factors. Speculation about Caspian oil resembles the struggle for division of the Middle Eastern oil after the First World War. At the height of the Cold War, Middle Eastern governments nationalized their oil fields and posed a major
challenge to the Western oil market by two successive embargoes. When the Caspian region slid out of the control of Russia, it was expected to be the third main energy basin independent from the Middle East and Russia. Although Western governments initially perceived the freeing of the Caspian energy basin as a historical opportunity to diversify energy supply, their failure to solve the many complicated problems attached to Caspian oil proves that this region can hardly be considered as independent from the political variables of either the Middle East or Russia.

In this essay I have tried to stress the impossibility of separating the Caspian region from the new geopolitical picture of the enlarged Middle East. Increasing international discussions about the new geopolitics of the Caspian region and its impact on the Middle East show the increased ties between the Middle East and its northern tier. The issues at stake in traditional Middle Eastern politics have been extended to the Caucasus and Central Asia, and in turn, the problems of the northern tier have reproduced and deepened the problems of the Middle East. Any policy initiative toward the region should take this situation into consideration and should acknowledge the realities and the new nature of the region’s problems. For example, the emergence of states that have the know-how to build nuclear capabilities has decreased the chance of a nuclear-weapon-free region and further complicated policies to prevent escalation and potential use of WMD. Discussions over the potential Caspian riches and the impact on Persian Gulf oil, Islamic resurgence, WMD, Israeli involvement, and the Caspian republics’ policy attitudes constitute clear evidence for the emergence of a new region that should be considered as a whole.

The new geopolitics of the New Middle East are driving major regional powers into new and more challenging policy formulations and strategic calculations. Internal challenges resulting from stagnating oil prices, demographic growth, political instabilities, and ill-fated economies represent grave issues for the region as a whole to cope with. Given all the features of the region, including its vast oil but small water resources, the unmet expectations of the so-called rogue states, and regional and international ambitions in relation to the region, the enlarged Middle East will continue to be among the primary danger zones of the globe. Given the impact of Caspian geopolitics on the Middle East, full-fledged, institutionalized collective
security cooperation seems to be an unlikely prospect. Against it stand decades-long conflicts, ill-defined borders, territorial and demographic fluidity, and lasting strategic competition for oil and water. Foreign policy analysts and policy makers should be aware of the fact that in the medium run, in an optimistic scenario, regional states will pursue defense and deterrence policies backed by shifting alliances.