The spread of radical political Islam, the criminalization of state institutions and economic transactions, the increase in cross-border narcotics trafficking, and the potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) represent an interrelated network of transnational challenges to the states and societies within the Caspian region and serve as a potential catalyst for conflicts among these states and between the Caspian states and their neighbors. In addition, these transnational issues have the potential to challenge the security of the West.

Organized crime has the ability to corrupt and undermine the already weak institutions in many of these states. To the extent that organized crime takes over the functions of the state, particularly those of local law enforcement and the military, repression of society may increase. As these states become further weakened, they become more vulnerable to challenges from internal and external extremists, including radical political Islamic movements that feed on society’s resentment and fear of chaos. This weakness, in turn, threatens to spill over into neighboring countries. The wars in Tajikistan, Chechnya, and Afghanistan have contributed to the emergence of

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political terrorism and the rise of Islamic extremism throughout the region.

The criminalization of the economy and the increase in political extremism and terrorism are also tied to the threat of WMD proliferation in Central Asia and the south Caucasus. Although political leaders have pledged to work together to curb the smuggling in weapons and narcotics that has increased as borders have become more porous and enforcement more problematic, the task is beyond the capability of any of these states either individually or collectively. Although there is no hard evidence of the transport of fissile material or chemical/biological weapons (CBW) along the main smuggling routes, there is a growing concern that the logistical capability exists. This capability presents a potentially critical challenge to both NATO and the West. The challenge is both direct, since the trade routes bring drugs and weapons to Russia and Europe, and indirect, because the rise in criminal trade and terrorism fuels conflicts between Caspian states attempting to preempt the spillover of these problems. This chapter examines the likelihood of both WMD proliferation and the spread of political Islam in this region and the implications of these trends for NATO and the West. The related issues of the increased trade in narcotics and the spread of organized crime are beyond the scope of this study and are discussed only as they have a bearing upon more traditional transnational geopolitical and security issues.

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3 The main narcotics and weapons smuggling routes are believed to be the Khorog-Osh highway through Tajikistan’s border with Afghanistan and across the mountains into the Fergana Valley in Kyrgyzstan, and the port city of Batumi in Georgia. See Irina Zviagelskaia and Vitalii Naumkin, “The Southern Tier: Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks for Russia’s Security,” in Rajan Menon, Yuri Fyodorov, and Ghia Nodia (eds.) (1999).

4 The spread of organized crime and the drug trade and their implications for regional security have been the subject of several additional excellent studies including Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., Mafia in Uniform, the Criminalization of the Russian Armed Forces, Foreign Military Studies Office, July 1995; and Turbiville, “Narcotics Trafficking in Central Asia: A New Colombia,” Military Review, Vol. LXXII, No. 12, December 1992, pp. 55–63.
THE RISK OF WMD PROLIFERATION

Ever since the breakup of the Soviet Union, some policymakers and analysts have worried that parts of the former Soviet Union could contribute to the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The decisions by Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, which inherited portions of the Soviet Union’s nuclear arsenal at the time of independence, to become nonnuclear states and to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), eased much of this concern. So, too, did Russia’s withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons stockpiled on the territory of former republics. Nonetheless, some observers still worry that the combination of fragile and unstable states and multiple threats in the Caspian security environment could lead to the further spread of WMD.

NATO must worry about three types of WMD threats in the Caspian region: (1) countries could seek to acquire their own weapons of mass destruction; (2) these countries could become a direct or indirect source of proliferation of weapons grade material, technology, and expertise to other areas, either because of government policies or because governments lack the capability to control exports and borders; and (3) terrorist groups could acquire WMD, particularly chemical and biological weapons, for blackmail or regime destabilization.

A close examination of the factors that motivate countries to seek WMD suggests, as Figure 3 below indicates, that at least in the short-to-medium term, there is a minimal risk that the countries of Central Asia and the south Caucasus will seek to acquire WMD. In judging the risks of WMD acquisition, several factors need to be taken into account:

- Whether any states would seek a WMD capability for national security reasons, e.g., to deter WMD or conventional military threats by a hostile state

5The discussion of the WMD threat in the Caspian region is based on extensive interviews with U.S. government officials. The authors wish to express their gratitude to those individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this project. See also William C. Potter, Nuclear Profiles of the Soviet Successor States, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Monterey, CA, May 1993.
• Whether there are any powerful bureaucratic or political interests within these states that might seek a WMD capability for parochial reasons
• Whether any of the states might seek to acquire WMD for prestige or to establish their national identities or fulfill nationalist aspirations
• Whether the country has the resources and the technological wherewithal to develop and produce WMD
• How these countries weigh the benefits of WMD acquisition against the potential military, economic, and political costs and risks.

At least for the foreseeable future, countries in Central Asia and the south Caucasus probably will not seek a WMD capability, because of the following considerations:

• For most of these countries, security and defense against external threats are not a high priority. The current regimes see more
immediate threats to security arising from internal stability, for which WMD are irrelevant and possibly counterproductive. From the perspective of the ruling elites, WMD development would have a detrimental effect on economic development, which they see as key to their survival and to long-term political and social stability.

• Some of the neo-communist governments, notwithstanding their rhetoric, see Russia as the ultimate guarantor of security and the status quo, rather than a military or security threat. Development of WMD would put at risk the military cooperation, bilateral alliances, and collective defense arrangements that help maintain external security.

• Given their modest plans for force development, the militaries of the various countries are unlikely to pose a conventional military threat to any of their neighbors.

• Because of the Russian presence in Central Asian military and security establishments, it is unlikely that any country could covertly acquire or develop a WMD capability. The Russians would, therefore, be in a position to raise the costs of such a program, which would be a serious risk given the continued military and economic dependence of these countries on Russia.

• None of these countries has powerful nuclear establishments whose parochial interests would be served by developing WMD. With the exception of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, none of the states in the Caspian region has aspirations for regional leadership or domination that might be advanced by WMD possession.

• These countries do not possess any stocks of weapons grade or fissionable material and, because most were not part of the old Soviet nuclear weapons infrastructure, do not have a cadre of scientific, engineering, and technological expertise. Further, all nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union have been removed from these countries.

• In general, none of the Caspian countries has the economic and technological means, at least in the near term, to develop WMD or the interest in allocating scarce resources to this task, which would retard economic development.
Finally, all the countries of Central Asia and the south Caucasus are members of the NPT. Hence, any civilian nuclear reactors they might build would be subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. In addition, these countries are members of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), which erect additional obligations to forgo CBW development.

**Tajikistan**

As the poorest and least successful of the Central Asian states, Tajikistan lacks the resources for a WMD program. Moreover, the current regime in Tajikistan is heavily dependent on Moscow (and others) for its survival and totally absorbed with managing its ethnic, tribal, regional, resource, and economic problems. Although Tajik officials fear Uzbek chauvinism and irredentism, they are likely to view the presence of WMD on their territory as a liability rather than an asset, in light of the potential for ethnic conflict and renewed civil strife.

**Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyzstan does not feel threatened by any external actors; instead, Bishkek’s main security concerns are control of the country’s porous borders and spillover of instability from Tajikistan. Accommodation with Russia is a central tenet of Kyrgyz security policy, and such a security orientation would be jeopardized by pursuit of a WMD capability. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan, like Tajikistan, lacks the resources to develop WMD and would be extremely vulnerable to outside pressure, isolation, and sanctions were it to pursue such an effort.

**Turkmenistan**

Turkmenistan does not see any external threat to its security. Indeed, President Niyazov has said that he could not foresee a threat to Turkmenistan for at least the next ten years. While the government is continuing to evolve a distinct security doctrine, two central tenets are

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already evident: first, Turkmenistan can best ensure its security and national self-identify through economic development; and, second, the country should avoid entanglements in alliances and collective security arrangements that could embroil it in the region’s many conflicts.

Kazakhstan

In view of its decision to relinquish nuclear weapons and to join the NPT as a nonnuclear weapons state, it is difficult to envision circumstances under which Kazakhstan would decide to pursue a WMD capability. To be sure, many Kazakhs remain fearful and suspicious of Russia, and worry that Kazakhstan’s security could be threatened by the revival of a neo-imperial or expansionist Russia. At the same time, however, Kazakhstan is more vulnerable to Russian pressure and more dependent on Russia’s economic system than any other country in the region. Moreover, even though Kazakhstan developed a capable nuclear infrastructure during the Soviet days, many of its members were ethnic Russians who would be unlikely to cooperate with the Kazakh government in an effort to acquire WMD. Further, most Kazakhs have a strong “allergy” to nuclear weapons because of the ecological disaster caused by Soviet nuclear testing and weapons development in Kazakhstan. Thus, any decision by Kazakhstan to acquire nuclear or other unconventional weapons would be highly unpopular and potentially destabilizing.

Uzbekistan

Of all the countries in Central Asia, Uzbekistan probably represents the most plausible proliferation risk, but the odds that Tashkent would seek a WMD capability are nevertheless low, especially in the absence of any perception of a Russian or Chinese military threat. To be sure, Uzbekistan aspires to regional domination, is preoccupied with national status, and has the potential economic and technical resources to support a WMD program. Moreover, Uzbekistan has outstanding territorial and ethnic conflicts with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and fears the possible fragmentation of Afghanistan and the formation of a “greater Tajikistan.” Faced with these threats to their territorial integrity and national unity, future Uzbek leaders might see WMD as the ultimate guarantor of security or as an instrument of
coercion and intimidation in resolving its many disputes or pressing its irredentist claims. On the other hand, Uzbekistan would face formidable challenges to acquiring WMD: It has no known quantities of fissile material and no plans to build the necessary facilities to produce such material; like other Central Asian states, Uzbekistan is a member of the NPT, and thus any facilities it might build would be subject to IAEA and possibly supplemental bilateral safeguards; and Uzbek leaders have made it clear that they will continue to depend on Russia to guarantee Uzbek security and stability—a relationship that could be imperiled if the Uzbeks sought a truly independent defense identity based on possession of WMD.

**Azerbaijan**

The Azeris would appear to have neither the motives nor the means to acquire a WMD capability. Baku’s priority is to develop relations with the West, and Azeri officials understand that such ties would be put in jeopardy by a WMD program. Although the Azeris have serious differences with Armenia and Iran and remain worried about Russia, they are unlikely to see WMD as an advantage in thwarting potential threats from these countries. Instead, Baku is allocating its resources to improving Azerbaijan’s conventional, border control, and internal security forces to contain threats from Armenia and Iran, and is relying on its growing contacts with the West to counterbalance Russian power. Although profits from oil and gas exports could provide the resources to develop or acquire WMD, Azerbaijan has no WMD infrastructure, and its resources are likely to be used to address the country’s more pressing economic and social problems and to improve its conventional defenses.

**The Risk of Leakage**

There appears to be little risk that the south Caucasus region could contribute to the leakage of WMD-related technology and materiel. The Soviet-era WMD infrastructure has disappeared, and the United States and local governments are cooperating in strengthening export control systems, border controls, and the security of sensitive WMD-related items.
There is virtually no Soviet-era infrastructure remaining in the south Caucasus. Basic research in advanced science in Georgia and Armenia was not directly part of weapons development. Armenia continues to plan for nuclear power production; however, the reactors are not configured for the production of weapons-grade material. Armenia's existing nuclear reactors, because of their poor maintenance and location in an earthquake zone, pose a safety rather than proliferation problem. Likewise, Azerbaijan poses no proliferation threat—its WMD infrastructure is virtually nonexistent and the Azeris have made strides in establishing more effective export and border controls as part of its broader strategy to improve relations with the West and attract foreign investment for oil-related and infrastructure projects. Although some chemical weapons (CW) depots for riot control agents probably remain on Azeri territory, these stocks are not usable because of safety problems. Finally, the danger that these countries could become transshipment points for the illicit transfer of nuclear material has receded somewhat, largely because of U.S. export control and border security assistance. Given the priority the U.S. government attaches to controlling WMD material in the former Soviet Union, strong congressional support for this program, and the benefits host countries accrue from U.S. assistance, the United States is likely to remain engaged in this area for some time.

The risk of WMD leakage from Central Asia is somewhat more complicated. Much of the area, particularly Kazakhstan and, to a lesser degree, Uzbekistan, played a supporting role in the old Soviet WMD infrastructure; nevertheless, the risks of proliferation are minimal and likely to diminish further in the face of aggressive U.S. government efforts to police sensitive facilities and assist local governments in safeguarding nuclear material.

Much of the region's Soviet nuclear weapons production infrastructure, which was concentrated in Kazakhstan at Semipalatinsk, has decayed. Both the technical expertise that ran the facilities and the highly enriched uranium (HEU) associated with the operation of test reactors have been repatriated to Russia. In addition, the United States, with the cooperation of the government of Kazakhstan, removed a large quantity of HEU. Kazakhstan continues to operate an experimental breeder reactor at Aktau, a facility that could be configured to produce plutonium suitable for weapons fabrication. Although this is a source of concern, especially because of proximity to
the Iranian littoral, the proliferation danger at Aktau has been reduced for several reasons:

- The plutonium stockpile is being relocated to Semipalatinsk, where it will be more secure under IAEA safeguards with the installation of improved arrangements for protecting, controlling, and accounting for the material.
- U.S. personnel at Aktau have improved monitoring and surveillance of the facility.
- With U.S. assistance, Kazakhstan has made considerable progress in upgrading border controls, especially along the Caspian Sea approach.

The Soviets maintained a portion of their CBW program in the region, but little of it remains. According to press reports, the Soviet Union constructed a plant in Stepnogorsk in Kazakhstan for BW production; however, according to Jonathan Tucker, director of the Chemical and Biological Weapons Project at the Center for Non-Proliferation Studies, the facility did not actually engage in large-scale production and it is unclear whether BW were stockpiled at the site.7 This portion of the facility is now defunct, and most of the equipment has been returned to Russia, destroyed, or rendered inoperable. The Kazakhs, with U.S. assistance, are converting the remaining facility to civilian use.

Uzbekistan was also part of the Soviet BW program, but much of the associated infrastructure has atrophied. The Uzbeks and Kazakhs jointly control an island in the Aral Sea that was used as a BW testing facility; however, there were no known stockpiles of BW agents on the island. According to press reports, the United States is providing assistance to Uzbekistan for the destruction of a former Soviet CBW production facility.

With respect to the other Central Asian states, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan mine substantial quantities of uranium ore, but have no capability for enrichment. Neither country operates nuclear reactors nor has any weapons expertise. Similarly, Turkmenistan has no WMD-

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related infrastructure, material, or expertise. Border security in all three countries remains porous, but the lack of controls has most benefitted trafficking in drugs and conventional arms.

At the substate level, there are several real concerns about the acquisition and threatened use of weapons of mass destruction to further terrorist aims in the region. The judgment of experts considering substate groups with limited financial means is that the risk in descending order is chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons development and use.\(^8\) Chemical and biological weapons are relatively easy for small substate groups to construct using dual-purpose equipment and materials, whereas acquiring fissile material, as previously noted, is significantly more difficult. However, the probability of terrorist use of WMD is limited in the face of regional and financial obstacles:

- Subnational groups face the same limitations as do states in obtaining weapons material. No indigenous stocks of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons material exist in the region. Furthermore, the presence of Russian as well as international monitoring organizations greatly complicates the prospects for illicit acquisition.

- Terrorist groups need sponsors or significant sources of wealth to develop and produce WMD. As discussed earlier, the most logical sponsors of such groups, such as Iran or other Persian Gulf states, have little interest in destabilizing the region, even in the name of an Islamic revolution. That said, there is one group with potential resources that may have an interest in destabilization: Russian organized crime groups. This possibility should be monitored.

In sum, at least for the next five to ten years, the states and likely substate terrorist groups of the south Caucasus and Central Asia generally lack both the motivation and the means to become a significant WMD proliferation threat. Should unanticipated threats to national security emerge, governments are likely to rely on more traditional

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means of defense and deterrence, such as conventional military preparations, alliance formation, and the search for an external protector. Moreover, even if these states acquired WMD, it is unlikely that, with the exception of an Armenian WMD threat to Turkey, such weapons would pose a threat to NATO’s security or the security of moderate, pro-Western countries in the region, as long as these regimes remain out of the hands of militant, anti-Western Islamists.

THE SPREAD OF POLITICAL ISLAM

In the immediate aftermath of independence, there was a pervasive fear in the region of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. To a large extent, this anxiety reflected a mistaken perception that the civil war in Tajikistan was the result of an Islamist opposition movement that was incited and supported by Iranian religious propaganda and extensive Iranian military and financial assistance. Since the negotiation of a cease-fire in Tajikistan and the consolidation of a fragile governing coalition, fears of rampant Islamic fundamentalism have abated. Furthermore, as noted earlier, Iran’s decision to pursue its interests in a pragmatic manner have lessened anxieties about the growth of Islamic radicalism.

Eight years after the Caspian and Central Asian states gained their independence, Islam has not yet emerged as the dominant political force in the region, even though religious activism is on the rise. However, as Graham Fuller has observed, over the long term, local conditions could make Central Asia ripe for the growth of anti-Western Islamic radicalism. First, in a time of rapid change and transition, Islam resonates with those elements of society in search of national identity. Second, fundamentalist Islam has appeal as a reformist force, seeking to advance the cause of democratization, human rights, and social justice. Thus, many of the oppressed and downtrodden people of Central Asia, suffering under the repressive rule of authoritarian regimes, see Islamist movements as progressive in character. Third, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, the Central Asian countries are governed by ex-communist elites who can no longer rely on communist ideology or Soviet-era political structures for political control. Fourth, even though many Central Asian leaders have jumped on the nationalist bandwagon to garner popular support, the popularity and legitimacy that ruling elites enjoyed at the time of
independence are declining, in large measure because governments have been unable to meet the basic needs and expectations of the populace. Fifth, Islam flourishes under conditions that are prevalent throughout the region: political repression, economic deprivation and declining living standards, suppression of Islamic political activity, and the lack of legitimate and organized political institutions for the expression of popular grievances.9

It is not surprising, therefore, that there has been a renewal of interest in Islam throughout the region, as manifested in the creation of thousands of new mosques, the opening of new schools for Islamic education and training, the emergence of a more independent and activist generation of Islamist leaders (especially in Tajikistan and parts of Uzbekistan), the growing observance of traditional Islamic religious and cultural practices, and the growing popularity of the Islamic Renaissance Party. Moreover, Islamic awareness and influence are likely to grow as Soviet-era restrictions on Islamic religious and political activities are dismantled. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Islam in Central Asia, as elsewhere, is not monolithic but instead has separate strands, which should not be confused with “fundamentalism.” In addition, other cleavages in these societies will play a role in shaping national identities and social mobilization.10

Thus, few would disagree with the observation of one expert that:

No doubt, given that Islam is a vital part of their cultural makeup and the fact that for 70 years they were deprived of expressing their Islamic sentiments, Islam is bound to play a more prominent role in the social and political life of the ex-Soviet Muslim states as they begin to assert their cultural identity.11

In terms of Western security interests, however, what matters is not whether Islamic influence and awareness grow in Central Asia, but rather the brand of Islam that might emerge. A benign possibility is a more moderate, secular, nontheocratic version based on the Turkish

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9See Graham E. Fuller (April 1994).
model. If this were to happen, the West would have little to fear from the revival of Islam in Central Asia. The more menacing prospect is that the region could be swept by a radical, revolutionary Islamic movement under Iran’s influence and implacably hostile to Western interests in the greater Middle East and beyond. How likely is this threat and, if it is a serious risk, what options would NATO have to contain the expansion of Islamic radicalism and Iranian influence?

Although the influence of Islam and Islamic opposition groups is likely to grow, several factors militate against the emergence of militant, anti-Western Islamic governments and the formation of an Iranian-led pan-Islamic bloc:\(^\text{12}\)

- Virtually all of Central Asia’s Muslims (the main exception is Azerbaijan) are not Shia but Sunni, and from the conservative Hanafi sect. The predominant Sunni character of the Muslim republics makes them less receptive to Iranian influence. Additionally, Islam never sank deep roots throughout the less-urbanized parts of the region. In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, the dominant nomadic culture was fallow ground for the growth of Islam.

- The countries of Central Asia do not harbor the anti-Western, anti-colonial sentiments that are the signature of the militant, radical Islamic movement, for several reasons. First, the growth of radical Islam in Iran and throughout the Arab world resulted from the failure of previous secular and Western-oriented governments to meet the political, economic, and social needs of their people. The popular disenchantment with these governments and the pervasive Western presence in the Arab world sparked the development of a militant, anti-Western Islamic orthodoxy there. These conditions do not exist in Central Asia: no country in the region has experimented with Western-style government or endured colonial or other forms of repressive Western rule. Second, much of radical Islam’s anti-Western sentiment stems from the perception that the United States—and the West, in general—are biased toward Israel and hostile toward Muslims. In contrast, the Muslim republics of Central Asia are essentially

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\(^{12}\)This discussion draws heavily on Shireen Hunter (1992).
indifferent to the Arab-Israeli conflict—indeed some have forged close ties with Israel—and thus Western support for Israel does not engender Central Asian resentment of the West.

- Most of the Islamic groups in Central Asia have yet to develop close ties with the Iranian clerical establishment and have not received significant financial or religious support from Tehran. As a result, Iran’s ruling Islamic clergy exerts little influence over their co-religionists in Central Asia. Moreover, the leaders of Islamic groups in Central Asia have shown almost no interest in emulating the Iranian model.

Weighing the factors that might encourage the growth of radical Islam and the constraints on its development, it seems reasonable to conclude that the threat of Islamic fundamentalism has been exaggerated. As one scholar puts it:

Thus, even if [the governments of the Muslim republics] were to adopt a social and political system based on Islam, it is unlikely that the newly independent Muslim states would display the sort of anti-Western sentiments observed among groups in the Middle East. Moreover, there is a significant difference between, on the one hand, desiring a more prominent place for Islam and Islamic culture in the society . . . and, on the other, desiring to establish a government and polity based on a militant and extremist interpretation of Islam.13

To say that it is unlikely that militant Islam will spread through the region is not to say it cannot happen. Government policies and practices—particularly how governments manage the wealth produced by a booming energy sector—will be key factors in determining the growth of Islamic fundamentalism. In general, if the leaders of the Caspian countries satisfy the rising political, economic, and social expectations of their populations, respect the rights of minorities and the rule of law, and move toward pluralistic and democratic forms of government, it will be difficult for extremist ideologies to take root.

There is no guarantee, however, that the leaders of the states in Central Asia and the south Caucasus will embrace democratic values or that energy-driven profits will promote domestic stability. On the

contrary, there are signs that the leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan seek to suppress political movements that could express political, cultural, and economic grievances in a legitimate and peaceful manner. The real question, therefore, is whether the states will provide good and effective governance. If the neo-communist leaders of Central Asia fail this test, the Islamist message—a call for democracy, human rights, social justice, better social services, Islamic values, and an end to corruption and privilege—will find fertile ground. And Islamic movements, whether indigenous or imported, are the prime candidates for opposition to the state, especially when the state suppresses other political parties as well. The greater the state repression, the more radical and violent Islamic movements generally are likely to become. Militant crackdowns against any expression of Islam the state cannot control could lead to the creation of extremely violent, radicalized Islamic movements akin to those in Algeria and Egypt. In short, bad governance creates radical Islam, whether or not Iran is involved. And when wrapped in the mantle of nationalism, these radical Islamic movements could provide a rallying point for all disaffected elements of society.

Moreover, as a growing number of scholars and economists warn, experience has shown that resource wealth tends to have a negative effect on economic growth and, in the case of the Caspian states, could impede market reforms and exacerbate corruption that has reached near-epidemic proportions. The combination of growing economic inequality, runaway corruption, and exploding popular expectations of general prosperity is a potential recipe for violence and extremism.14

But even if events go sour and militant Islamic fundamentalism emerges as a serious political movement, it is unlikely that NATO would have a military role to play in containing or rolling back the growth of radical Islam, or even much leverage in trying to shape developments in a favorable manner through dialogue and consultation:

- Barring the emergence of fundamentalist rogue states that pose a WMD or conventional military threat to NATO members or key

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pro-Western governments in the Persian Gulf region, the odds are extremely low that NATO would want to undertake operations aimed at containing the spread of Islam in Central Asia.

- Other countries whose security would be directly threatened by radical Islam and who have greater capabilities to bring decisive influence to bear (most especially Russia) will defend their “special rights” to deal with this challenge and are unlikely to support a prominent role for NATO.

- The fortunes of radical Islam will be determined primarily by the internal dynamics of the Central Asian countries themselves; NATO’s influence over this process is sharply limited and would almost certainly not be decisive.

In sum, military force is an inappropriate tool for containing the spread of radical Islam. The most effective way to deal with this potential danger, as many commentators have noted, is Western assistance for implementing programs that support free-market economic development, the rule of law and basic human rights, and the promotion of democratic and civic societies.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\text{See, for example, Ariel Cohen, The New Great Game: Oil Politics in the Caucasus and Central Asia (1996).}\)