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**TRANSFORMATION IN REGIONAL SECURITY:  
THE POLITICAL DIMENSION**

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Regional security, similarly to domestic politics, has undergone a revolutionary transformation since the end of the Cold War. The world is now much more complex, changeable, and challenging for all Western allies and for each state in the former East European region. My remarks today will focus on three overlapping zones of security and three major international security threats in this broader European region.

### **Overlapping Zones of Security**

Bulgaria occupies a strategically key position in the intersection of three regions critical for the security of a wider Europe and an enlarged Atlantic Alliance: the Central-Eastern European region; the Black Sea-Caspian region; and the Balkans-East Mediterranean region.

***Central-Eastern Europe:*** The CEE zone is the new eastern frontier of both Europe and the Atlantic Alliance. A string of countries from Estonia to Bulgaria form an integral part of NATO and all will soon be members of the EU. They will help shape the foreign and security policy of both organizations and their combined demographic strength, political number, and economic development will add weight to their regional and trans-Atlantic influence. The majority of these states are close allies of the U.S. and are strong Atlanticists in their strategic orientation. They also have foreign policy priorities to expand the CEE zone to incorporate Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the three south Caucasus republics and will canvass both NATO and the EU to achieve these targets and buttress their own security.

***Black Sea-Caspian Region:*** This is a region containing both great potential and grave threats. As a major corridor for energy transportation, it has enormous prospects for economic development and cross-border cooperation. At the same time, the region remains torn by secessionist movements, weak or authoritarian states, ethnic tensions, rising Islamic militancy, and an absence of regional coherence and effective security mechanisms. It is a politically diverse zone, containing three NATO allies, three NATO hopefuls, and an increasingly assertive Russia. In particular, the westernization of Ukraine and the stabilization of the south Caucasus will be essential in securing this region as a component part of the trans-Atlantic community of nations.

***Balkans-East Mediterranean:*** Politically and strategically, the Balkans or South Eastern European region is interlinked with the Eastern Mediterranean as it includes Greece,

Turkey, and Cyprus and is a major transit route connecting Europe with the Middle East. While the Eastern Balkan countries have been fully stabilized and secured, the Western Balkans are still in a process of transformation from defunct state and economic structures to modern functioning systems. Once the final status of Kosova is decided and with Serbia and Montenegro building their own legitimate independent states this region can move more resolutely toward both NATO and EU membership. Such a scenario would help secure the broader Balkan trade and energy corridor between the Caspian Basin and Central Europe and significantly project security toward the broader Eastern Mediterranean zone.

### **Major Security Threats**

Three serious security challenges confront these intersecting and inter-dependent regions and they have various negative consequences for political stability, economic development, and inter-state cooperation. The three are Russian expansionism, energy insecurity, and political turbulence.

***Russian Expansionism:*** Putin's Russia has become an assertive power seeking to restore its spheres of influence, challenging its many neighbors, and capable of undermining Western interests and the stability of all three strategic zones. Russia possess significant tools at its disposal to gradually realize its ambitions or at the very least to undermine security along its borders and any further expansion of the democratic world. Russia is both a model for statist authoritarianism and a source of regional insecurity, especially as Moscow views its former satellites as a focus of competition with the Western allies.

To promote Russia's regional predominance, President Putin set himself the fundamental task of consolidating the Russian state, centralizing the administration, eliminating separatist forces, and subduing any viable political opposition. These goals are now near complete as the Kremlin has asserted control over the media, the parliament, the provinces, and the major economic enterprises, stifled the civic sector through its NGO law and imposed control over the leading oligarchs who are now either politically neutralized or serve Kremlin interests.

Simultaneously, Putin has developed an assertive two-pronged foreign policy: to reign in wayward neighbors within its orbit and to establish strategic global alliances that can help project Russian power and undermine American influence and Alliance unity. In this context, Russian policy toward wayward neighbors in Eastern Europe and along the Black Sea has specific objectives and methods. In particular, the wider European region, including Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, is as an important arena for regaining a broad sphere of dominance and projecting Russia's rising international power toward Central and Western Europe. The reintegration of the "post-Soviet space" became a

priority under Putin, as it would elevate Russia's contention that it was an important global player and a stabilizing factor in "Eurasia." Moscow opposes any significant foreign military presence in the region, resists the creation of regional pro-Western alliances, and seeks to dissuade its neighbors from inviting U.S. forces or petitioning for NATO entry. Moscow has tried to determine each country's foreign and security policy, to benefit from local political, ethnic, sub-regional, religious, and social turbulence, to limit the progress of military integration with the U.S., and to obstruct forms of regional cooperation that countered Russia's objectives to reestablish its zones of influence and dominance.

***Energy Insecurity:*** The extraction, transportation, and supply of energy resources are a growing source of regional tension, global competition, and great power politics. A number of countries have developed dependency relationships with specific energy suppliers, thus exposing them to political pressures and destabilizing economic vulnerabilities. In this context, the CEE states have a much higher level of dependence than the West European (WE) countries on a specific single source, Russia, for their oil and gas supplies. Russia views itself as an "energy superpower" and is using its primary resource to elevate its global power by steadily strengthening its position on Europe's energy market. The EU as a whole is becoming increasingly dependent on Russian energy. Russia provides nearly half of Europe's natural gas and a third of its oil. When the new Gazprom pipeline under the Baltic Sea is completed and other routes are finalized, Europe will depend on Russia for up to 80 percent of its gas supplies.

Energy dependence makes each country vulnerable to unpredictable disruptions, whether because of terrorist attacks, environmental or climatic emergencies, decreasing extraction capabilities, infrastructural and supply breakdowns, or deliberate cut-offs engineered to exert political pressure on a targeted country. Energy dependence is heightening as economies expand, demand for energy increases, and alternative supplies remain costly, distant, and limited.

The EU lacks a coherent, effective, and long-term policy regarding its future energy needs. In the meantime, Russia has developed a broad geo-energy strategy, which is designed to maximize its domestic strength, global reach, and great power status. Caught in the middle are the CEE, Black Sea, and Balkan countries seeking to lessen their dependence on a single source that may prove unreliable or politically motivated. The Russian-Ukrainian "gas war" earlier this year exposed the inadequacies of the Union's energy strategy, the EU's failures to heed the warnings of its CEE newcomers, and Brussels' unrealistic and often naïve policy toward Russia. The EU has not considered energy security as a high priority or energy itself as a strategic weapon and seems unable to determine a common strategy that would protect each European state from future energy disruptions.

***Political Turbulence:*** Various forms of political unrest, social turbulence, and sub-state militancy are evident within these three strategic zones and along their peripheries. While such threats may not directly destabilize either the NATO or EU countries, they can seriously retard the region's economic development, complicate inter-state cooperation, and delay the emergence of a wider Europe. The new border of the EU and NATO will confront mounting political and social challenges as populations expand, governments become more ambitious, competition for resources and regional predominance intensifies, and various outside powers become more assertive. Cross-border Islamist terrorism is a particularly potent threat directly challenging the interests of emerging democracies and America's New Allies in CEE.

While counter-terrorist operations are necessary to combat imminent threats, the trans-Atlantic alliance must also find ways to pre-empt the emergence of movements in the Islamic world and among Muslim populations that seek to undermine Western interests and the progress of democratic states. The Alliance must endeavor to transform weak states into effective states, and authoritarian regimes into authoritative democracies without unleashing radical forces that will seek to exploit the political space to sow chaos or establish new dictatorships.

### **Alliance Responses**

In terms of Alliance responses to the opportunities and threats in the strategic zones I have outlined, let me offer two suggestions.

First, the U.S. administration must clarify the practical and long-term implications of its stated commitment to expanding human rights and democracy, as this would help garner international support and reduce anti-American trends in public opinion. The EU and U.S. both seek to expand the democratic world, but they often focus on differing methods to accomplish such an objective. In addition to a more coordinated U.S.-EU response that can balance the strengths of both partners, Washington should look more closely at what the Central European, Balkan, and Black Sea states can bring into this process. CEE officials point out that the region's experience with far-reaching political and economic transformations can serve as lessons for other aspiring democracies and help Allied interests in promoting pluralistic systems in various unstable regions.

Second, in pursuit of democratic allies and a durable security structure, the U.S. must also work with its partners in the EU and NATO in developing a coherent, coordinated, and effective policy toward the wider Europe and toward an increasingly authoritarian and ambitious Russia, which may also face major internal instability in the years ahead beyond the Putin era. Above all, the Allies need to be clear that attempts to prevent or reverse democratic changes in an expanding Europe will be countered with effective U.S.-EU support for democratic forces along NATO's and the EU's eastern borders.

Closer coordination of policy would also prevent any state from driving wedges between Europe and America. Even where the EU or NATO cannot offer an imminent prospect of membership, they can enhance their programs and links with particular states and send strong political messages that Europe is not complete until all of its countries become democracies and members of the continent's principal multi-national institutions.