



BULLETIN OF THE INSTITUTE FOR WESTERN AFFAIRS

■ The 52nd Munich Security Conference: Between Dialogue and Confrontation

Kamil Szubart

The 52nd Munich Security Conference (February 12-14, 2016) brought together 30 heads of state and government, 70 foreign affairs and defense ministers and hundreds of diplomats and experts. Invitations were also extended to King Abdullah II of Jordan, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini. As in the preceding year, the organizers prepared *Munich Security Report 2016: Boundless Crises, Reckless Spoilers, Helpless Guardians*, a rundown of key security threats across the globe. The report was presented on January 28, 2016 in Berlin in the presence of former UN Security General Kofi Annan, Chief of Staff of the German Chancellery and Federal Refugee Coordinator Peter Altmaier and former Chancellor of Austria Wolfgang Schüssel. Some of the contributors to *Munich Security Report 2016* included the academics and staff of Chatham House, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Jane's Information Group of IHS Inc., UNHCR, Mercator Institute for China Studies as well as analysts representing foreign affairs and defense ministries and the Chancellor's Office.

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Day one was defined by the Syrian conflict and the war on the so called Islamic State (ISIS). The issue was addressed in the keynote speeches by the German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen and the French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. Minister von der Leyen expressed solidarity with France in connection with the Paris attacks perpetrated by ISIS and Al-Qaida-linked terrorist cells. She emphasized that these organizations and their regional branches (such as Al-Shabab) seek to destroy

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liberal pluralistic societies of the West and establish a global caliphate. Both ministers noted that despite Russia's support for President's Bashar regime and the Russian air strikes on the moderate opposition to al-Assad since September 2015, there was nevertheless space for Russia in the international coalition against ISIS. Minister Le Drian thanked Germany for its deployment of Bundeswehr's air and marine contingents in Syria (6 reconnaissance aircraft, one frigate and one Airbus 310 MRTT aerial refueling tanker aircraft) in compliance with the EU's mutual defense clause enshrined in art. 42(7) of the EU Treaty. While Ursula von der Leyen stressed the need for boosting Muslim communities financially to neutralize Islamic extremism, Jean-Yves Le Drian underlined the need to carry on with military operations. Paris considers it essential to deploy a global strategy for combatting ISIS and to liberate Mosul and Ar-Rakki as a matter of urgency. To that end, a broad-based land offensive needs to be launched. Nevertheless, the French Minister failed to specify who precisely would spearhead such an offensive.

In contrast to Minister Le Drian, Ursula von der Leyen placed additional emphasis on the migration crisis. She noted that the current predicament should be viewed as both a humanitarian crisis affecting the EU's peripheral regions and as one undermining the Schengen area. She mentioned Germany's admission into the country of 1.1 million refugees in 2015 and the growing popular support for nationalist and chauvinistic movements across EU member states. Minister von der Leyen spoke in favor of establishing a permanent supranational refugee-sharing mechanism in the EU, sealing the EU's external borders and continued financial support for Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. She noted that the effort to curb uncontrolled migration should focus on combating the criminal organizations involved in smuggling refugees from Turkey to the EU. To that end, the EU should strengthen Frontex and step up measures within the framework of NATO Standing Maritime Groups, as approved by the defense ministers of the NATO member states in Brussels on February 10, 2016 in response to the proposal by Chancellor Angela Merkel made during her meeting with Turkey's Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu held in Ankara on February 8, 2016. As part of its engagement in the Aegean Sea, NATO will be tasked with conducting reconnaissance, monitoring and surveillance in cooperation with Frontex and the Turkish and Greek coastguards. Ursula von der Leyen also stressed the significance of the Bundeswehr, which - in addition to its engagement in patrolling and training activities in Syria and Iraq has also been actively involved in programs aimed at integrating immigrants into the German society in general and the labor market in particular.

The opening panel session entitled "*Daesh*" *Terror and Safeguarding Liberties* also involved heads of the GCHQ (Robert Hannigan), AIVD (Rob Bertholee), EU INTCEN (Gerhard Conrad) and the US National Intelligence (James Clapper)¹. The coming together in a single session of heads and coordinators of intelligence services operating at the international level as well as the European External Action Service, was without precedence in the history of the Munich Conference. The priority topic in the panel debate was the role of intelligence services in averting terrorist threats from

¹ GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters), a British intelligence agency in charge of gathering intelligence by electronic means; AIVD (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst) the Main Intelligence and Security Agency of the Netherlands; EU INTCEN (EU Intelligence and Situation Centre) constituting a part of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

ISIS and al-Kaida as well as inter-agency trans-Atlantic cooperation. J. Clapper's presence was also intended to "warm up" the image of American intelligence services which had suffered serious damage during the Snowden scandal and in connection with NSA and CIA activities in Germany.

The migration crisis was at the top of the agenda of the final panel session on day one of the conference entitled *Refuge Refused? The EU and the Migrant Crisis*. The session was attended by P. Altmeier, foreign affairs ministers of Turkey (Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu), the Netherlands (Bert Koenders) and Italy (Paolo Gentiloni) as well as William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration. The head of the Turkish diplomatic corps underlined his country's acceptance of 2.5 million war refugees who crossed its border with Syria. He also warned that the conquest of Syria's largest city of Aleppo by President al-Assad's regime forces is likely to trigger yet another wave of migration to Turkey - the new influx is anticipated to reach hundreds of thousands. P. Altmeier, in his turn, justified Germany's prior admission of migrants with the country's obligations under humanitarian law and the need to prevent a humanitarian disaster in the Western Balkans and along the EU's outer borders. He echoed Minister von der Leyen's view that financial support is needed for Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey which, as a country adjacent to Syria, will be the natural choice as the first destination for the Syrian refugees. The panel session participants agreed that the adoption of the peace plan for Syria proposed by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) on the fringes of the Munich Conference will only be possible the warring parties fully implement the agreement on the cessation of hostilities, if humanitarian aid is delivered to Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and the farming outskirts of Damascus and if the Geneva talks, broken in the early February 2016, are resumed.

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Day two of this year's Security Conference was devoted to the Donbas crisis, the security deficit along the eastern flank of NATO and the future role of the Alliance. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, whose address preceded the panel discussion (which also attended by the Prime Ministers of France and Russia Manuel Valls and Dmitry Medvedev), made a direct reference to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and to Moscow's aggression towards its immediate neighbors: Ukraine and the Baltic countries. He strongly emphasized that NATO is not seeking to confront Russia and that the Alliance needs to respond firmly to any threats to its members by applying the Washington Treaty, without shutting down channels for dialogue within the "defense and dialogue" framework. Prime Minister Medvedev accused the West of meddling with the European security architecture and pursuing an aggressive policy towards Russia, which contributes to a new cold war. He also recalled the speech of President Putin delivered at the 43rd Munich Security Conference in 2007 and specifically his warning against the adverse effects of "the ideological stereotypes and double moral standards of the West". His conclusions were echoed by Minister Lavrov during the *Foreign Ministers' Debate* session involving the foreign affairs ministers of Germany, Russia and the UK. The head of the Russian diplomatic corps blamed Ukraine for reneging on the Minsk Agreement by, among others, failing to take measures that would decentralize the country and grant substantial autonomy to Donbas. He accused

the United States and other NATO members of providing regular funding and training to the Ukrainian armed forces.

The first speaker to criticize Russian activities in eastern Ukraine and Syria was John Kerry, US Secretary of State and Chairman of the Senate Committee on Armed Services. Mr. Kerry stressed strong trans-Atlantic links and efforts to strengthen the US presence in Europe within the framework of the European Reassurance Initiative introduced by President Barack Obama during his visit in Poland and Estonia in June 2014. At the time, Washington resolved to increase its financial envelope from the current US\$ 790 million to US\$ 3.4 billion. The primary purpose of the funds is to finance an enhanced rotational presence of American forces in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries, conduct joint exercises and provide funding and training to the Ukrainian army. Secretary Kerry also noted the need for closer cooperation between the USA and the EU member states by concluding the TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and for having the UK remain in the EU.

A much more resolute position was presented by Senator McCain who remarked that Russia is seeking to break up the solidarity between the European members of NATO by fueling the refugee crisis and stepping up support for the political parties and movements that contest European unity. He expressed his skepticism regarding the ISSG Agreement and specifically Moscow's willingness to make good on its obligations. He concluded that the Agreement only serves the interests of President Putin and the Russian-backed forces of President al-Assad who is continuing his offensive against Aleppo. According to Senator McCain, Russia's objective in Syria is to establish a powerful foothold that will enable Moscow to exercise influence over the entire Middle East.

The heads of state and foreign affairs ministers from NATO's eastern flank countries noted the deepening security deficit in the region caused by Moscow's aggressive policy and its keenness to use military power. Poland's President Andrzej Duda, who took part in the *Presidential Debate* session involving the heads of state of Finland (Sauli Niinistö), Lithuania (Dalia Grybauskaitė) and Ukraine (Petro Poroshenko) as well as the President of the European Parliament (Martin Schulz), stressed the need to strengthen NATO's eastern flank by establishing a permanent presence of substantial allied forces in Poland and the Baltic countries. President Duda also referred to the Nord Stream II project which he assessed as purely political noting that relations among the EU member states should rely on mutual respect. President Poroshenko reiterated that the Donbas conflict is not a merely internal affair but rather an act of aggression on the part of Russia, which seeks to promote an "alternative" Europe by supporting pro-Russian parties and social movements. Mr. Poroshenko appealed for maintaining sanctions against Russia to keep it at the negotiating table. Full dialogue, he argued, will only be possible if Russian forces pull out of Ukraine and if Russia returns Crimea. The President of the European Parliament observed that the Russian government is driving a wedge between EU countries. He indirectly referred to the economic cooperation between Russia and Hungary.

During the panel debate entitled *Between Reassurance and Reengagement? The Future of NATO*, which involved the Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg,

the ministers of defense Michael Fallon of the UK and Peter Hultqvist of Sweden, the Polish foreign affairs minister Witold Waszczykowski and Chairman of the NATO Military Committee gen. Petr Pavel, emphasis was placed on NATO's future and its deterrence capabilities. The head of the Polish diplomatic corps underlined that the September 2014 decisions made at the NATO Summit in Newport fall short of ensuring security for the Central and Eastern European members of the Alliance. Referring to the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security Between NATO and the Russian Federation signed on May 27, 1997, he stated that Moscow's actions have rendered the document obsolete and suggested that part two of the act, which concerns communication channels, should remain in effect. The Polish postulates to strengthen the eastern flank of NATO have received the full support of the Norwegian Prime Minister. The Swedish Minister of Defense, whose involvement in the panel session highlighted the closeness that exists in the mutual relationship between Stockholm and NATO, noted that by annexing Crimea in March 2014, Russia had clearly violated international law.

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Germany's objectives in Munich were expressed in particular by Minister von der Leyen and Foreign Affairs Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Minister Steinmeier, who delivered two speeches during the Munich Conference, began with a reference to German's Chairmanship of the OSCE and the ISSG meeting held on the eve of the Conference. He noted that the ISSG Agreement will only be successful if the decision to cease hostilities, deliver humanitarian aid to the besieged regions and resume the Geneva talks scheduled for February 25, 2016, are fully implemented. Further, Minister Steinmeier emphasized the pivotal role played by Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia in resolving the Syrian crisis and reaffirmed Germany's diplomatic, financial and military commitments. His second contribution was made during the *Foreign Ministers' Debate* involving the foreign affairs ministers of Russia and the UK. The head of the German diplomatic corps underlined in particular the deployment of the Bundeswehr in Middle Eastern and African operations. He thereby alluded to Berlin's January 6, 2016 decision approving the extension, to January 31, 2017, of Bundeswehr's training mission mandate for northern Iraq and Mali (MINUSMA). The Minister also referred to the Bundeswehr's modernization. Within the next 15 years, Germany will spend 130 billion euro on this purpose thereby increasing Germany's contribution to the collective security of the trans-Atlantic area. Minister Steinmeier additionally mentioned other unstable countries, i.e. Afghanistan and Libya, which have been marginalized through ISIS' expansion into Syria and northern Iraq and which remain under continued threat from Islamic extremism.

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Although this year's agenda of the Munich Conference centered on the Syrian conflict, the refugee crisis and the Donbas developments, other issues having to do with security threats outside of the Euro-Atlantic region were also tackled. The *Doubling Down? China and the International Order(s)* panel debate, which involved former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd, Singapore's Minister of Defense Ng Eng Hen and Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Robert Corker, focused on the growing international significance of Beijing and specifically on territorial

disputes regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and the significance for China and the EU of the New Silk Route.

As during the 2015 Security Conference, the 2016 edition also included a debate on epidemics and pandemics: the *Night Owl Session: The Plot Sickens - The Health-Security Nexus*. The speakers focused on the zika virus epidemic in Brazil, which poses the risk of spreading throughout South America. Another major issue, raised during the *Climate and Energy Security: Is the Heat Still on?* debate, was the implementation of the climate agreement concluded during the Paris Climate Conference of December 2015.

A number of key multilateral meetings were also held as side events to the Conference. The hours-long ISSG meeting and bilateral US-Russian talks were held on the night of 11 February 2016, leading to the adoption of another Syria roadmap. Before the start of day two of the Conference, foreign affairs ministers met in the Normandy format to discuss the Donbas conflict. The participants expressed their intent to continue implementing the Minsk Agreement of February 12, 2015. This was the first meeting of the heads of the diplomatic corps of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine held since November 6, 2015. At the initiative of Minister Steinmeier and the US Secretary of State John Kerry, invitations to Munich were extended to members of the Presidency Council for Libya. On February 13, 2016, members of that Council held multilateral talks with the foreign affairs ministers of Germany, the US, Egypt, Italy and France, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Martin Kobler, Special Representative, Head of United Nations Support Mission in Libya. The talks revolved around the internal situation in Libya, the migration crisis and the fight against the Libyan fractions of ISIS.

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The deliberations of the 52nd Munich Security Conference focused on the Syrian crisis, uncontrolled migrations, the Donbas conflict and the developments along NATO's eastern flank. The fears of NATO's Central and Eastern European and Baltic member states were recognized by political decision-makers from Western Europe and the US. Nevertheless, no specific proposals were put forward towards establishing a permanent presence of allied forces in their territories. Washington only confirmed reports on allocating US\$ 3.5 billion to the European Security Initiative, primarily to continuing the rotational presence of American forces in the region. Particularly restrained on the issue were representatives of France and Germany who focused on the Syrian conflict and the refugee crisis. At this time, Paris chooses to support continued aerial strikes on ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front targets. Meanwhile, Germany's actions focus on patrol and reconnaissance missions. Ministers von der Leyen and Steinmeier underlined the need to continue dialogue within the framework of the ISSG, implement UN Security Council Resolution 2254 of December 18, 2015, and continue working towards a solution of the Iranian, Saudi Arabian and Turkish conflicts. The presence in Munich of the foreign affairs ministers Abdel bin Ahmed al-Jubeir of Saudi Arabia and Mohammad Javad Zarif of Iran and their involvement in the Syria talks within the framework of the ISSG should be seen as a success of the German diplomacy which, in the face of a crisis between Rijad and Teheran, continues its diplomatic offensive in the Middle East.



The statements expressed herein reflect solely the opinions of its author.

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