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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CONFERENCE: “MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE”

Michal Hežely*

The 52nd Annual Munich Security Conference, one of the world's most renowned conferences of its kind, took place from February 12 to February 14, 2016. For the fifty-second time, Munich hosted the world's political elite and other notable persons from the field of international politics. In total, more than 600 state officials attended the conference. Every year, the topics of the Munich Security Conference are connected to current global security challenges and other future challenges. The conference itself served as a platform for various panel discussions. Part of the forum consisted of non-formal discussions, debates and roundtable debates. Slovakia was also represented at the Munich Security Conference – attending the conference were the Slovak Minister of Foreign and European Affairs **Miroslav Lajčák** and the Vice President of the European Commission **Maroš Šefčovič**, who was also one of the speakers of a panel discussion about energy security during the conference's third day.

The conference opened with the opening statement of **Wolfgang Ischinger**, the current Chairman of the Munich Security Conference, who also served as Germany's ambassador to the United States and Great Britain in the past. Taking the floor afterwards were **Ursula von der Leyen**, the Minister of Defence of Germany and the French Minister of Defence **Jean-Yves Le Drian**. In their speeches, both von der Leyen and Le Drian talked about the threat of global terrorism. *“We don't need bricks to renew stability in Syria. We need reliable and versatile people,”* stressed von der Leyen, who also specified Germany's position in the fight against the threat of global terrorism. In her statement, von der Leyen said that Germany only battles the consequences of terrorism, including the current migrant crisis in Europe. It is worth noting that while von der Leyen praised Germany's approach to the migrant crisis and its limited

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involvement in the Syrian crisis, Ischinger criticised the small role the country is playing in the context of the whole crisis. Le Drian stressed the fact that France is actively taking part in joint bombardments in Syria. He also added that he envisions enhanced cooperation between Germany, France and Syria in the future. *“Both France and Germany could help in renewing the Syrian army, but only after the election of a new, legitimate government,”* said Le Drian. Another interesting part of the first day was the panel discussion about the growing influence of the Islamic State and their “reign” of terror. In his opening statement, **James Clapper**, the director of the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), declared that according to information gathered by the DIA, 59 states are currently unstable, while seven states are at the brink of collapsing. Furthermore, Clapper warned about the possibility of ISIL using chemical weapons, while also stating that ISIL already utilised them several times in the past. Clapper also shared another concerning fact with the audience – ISIL is reportedly manufacturing their own chemical weapons. There is also substantial concern that the United States may face direct attacks from radical Islamists, while the terror group is reportedly planning more attacks in Europe. Together with the heads of the British and Dutch intelligence agencies, Clapper stressed the need for an encryption reform – new crypting technologies should ensure that no substantial information leaks, like in the case of **Edward Snowden**², would happen in the future. The first day of the conference continued with numerous statements and panel discussions. A reception hosted by the Lord Mayor of Munich **Dieter Reiter** was held in the evening. A Night Owl session took place following the reception, with the session ending the first day of the conference.

The second day of the Munich Security Conference began with the opening statement of **Frank-Walter Steinmeier**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany. **Jens Stoltenberg**, the General Secretary of NATO, took the floor afterwards. Stoltenberg praised the decisions NATO made in light of the migrant crisis and the crisis in Syria. In his statement, Stoltenberg stressed that NATO is doing everything to avoid war, not to cause it. Furthermore, he criticised Russia’s actions in regards to the Syrian crisis and the crisis in Ukraine.

² Snowden rose to prominence as a whistle-blower in 2013 after he gave the British newspaper The Guardian secret information about surveillance activities of the NSA without the agency’s permission. Snowden’s actions resulted in a great wave of critique of the NSA and the government of the United States.

According to Stoltenberg, Russia is willingly putting itself into the role of a global antagonist. Despite this, he said that NATO's goal is to prevent any form of confrontation with Russia. *"Our goal is to avoid confrontation. We don't want a new Cold War to happen,"* Stoltenberg emphasized.

The conference's second day highlight was the debate of Prime Ministers, which was attended by the French Prime Minister *Manuel Valls* and by his Russian counterpart **Dmitry Medvedev**. The debate was chaired by Wolfgang Ischinger. During his speech, the Russian Prime Minister made several statements, which attracted the audience's interest. He depicted Russia as a victim of the West, yet he stressed the need for cooperation between both sides. Medvedev's statements were a bona fide example of the two-faced Russian foreign policy – on one hand, Russia presents itself as a country, which acts without any compromises, but on the other hand, he always emphasized the need for global cooperation. During his statement, he warned that if the situation will not be resolved soon, we might be facing a new chapter of the Cold War. *"One could go so far as to say that we have slid back to a new Cold War. Sometimes I wonder whether it is 2016 we live in or 1962,"* said Medvedev. In his statement, he clearly pointed out similarities between the current crises in Ukraine and Syria with the crisis on Cuba in 1962. He further added that it was the West, which broke of the dialogue about cooperation and the US and the European Union are once again putting Russia into the position of a threat to global peace. It is worth noting that **Vladimir Putin** made a similar statement in 2007. Since Putin's speech, the relationship between Russia and the West has further deteriorated. Medvedev further stressed that both the West and Russia have a common enemy – terrorism. In regards to the conflict in Syria, Medvedev said that the Russians are trying to play a constructive role. Based on his statements, Russia tries to protect the country's national interest. Valls disagreed with Medvedev, criticising Russia's involvement in the Syrian crisis, demanding that the country ceases its bombardments in Syria, while also stressing the need to respect the ceasefire, its main condition being that *Bashar al-Assad* steps down. Only then can peace once again return to the country.

John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, who took the floor after the prime minister debate, also demanded that Russia ceases bombardments in Syria. With his *"The US cares!"* statement, Kerry made clear that the US is worried about the current events in both Syria and Ukraine. In his speech, Kerry labelled Russia as *"a repeat aggressor in both Ukraine and Syria"*. He stated that Russia acts against the will of the international community. Kerry also praised the

European Union for upholding their sanctions towards Russia. The said sanctions should only be revoked if Russia demonstrates that it acts in good faith. Regarding the ceasefire in Syria, Kerry said that in order for the ceasefire to be effective, Russia needs to change its tactics in the country. He further stated that al-Assad stepping down is one of the requirements of putting an end to the Syrian conflict. Kerry pointed out that al-Assad wants to regain power over the entire country, which would be far from a definitive solution to the ongoing conflict. In regards to the situation in Ukraine, Kerry presented Russia with two options – either they country will respect the conditions of the Minsk agreement, or it will face further sanctions from the European Union.

Following Kerry's speech was the debate of Foreign Ministers, attended by the German Minister Steinmeier and his Russian and British counterparts **Sergey Lavrov** and **Philip Hammond**. The debate was again chaired by Wolfgang Ischinger. All attending ministers made it clear that they do not share Kerry's opinion of the involvement of the United States in both crises. Lavrov was noticeably tense in his statements, as he once again stressed the need for international cooperation in solving the Syrian crisis. This, according to the United States, just is not possible, namely because Russia bombards groups supported by the US. He also expressed Russian support for President al-Assad. *"We shouldn't demonize al-Assad, we shouldn't demonize anyone in Syria except the terrorists,"* added Lavrov. Furthermore, he stated that solving the crisis without Russian involvement is impossible. The Russian Foreign Minister also suggested that both the West and Russia view the term peace differently. He also presented himself as a sceptic of the planned ceasefire, which is quite a paradox considering he was one of the people involved in the negotiations. Both Steinmeier and Hammond agreed that the United States wouldn't solve the problems Europe is currently facing. There were reportedly no discussions about what the EU expects from the US in the search for a solution of the current crises. Like Steinmeier, Hammond also stated that Kerry has no leverage in the current negotiations with Russia.

The second day of the conference continued with more panel discussions, the topics being China's global position, the future of NATO, climate and energy security and perspectives of Euro-Atlantic integration. Following the discussions, a state dinner under the auspices of the Minister-President of Bavaria **Horst Seehofer** took place. The second day was closed off by a Night Cap Session on the topic of the future of warfare.

The third and final day of this year's Munich Security Conference started

with the opening statement of the former Secretary General of the UN and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate **Kofi Annan**.

The conference's final day was specific, as the panel discussions were divided into three thematic blocks, while the previous two days only had one. Despite this, the third day was the shortest day of the conference. The first thematic block touched the topics of security policies in Africa. Numerous notable African state officials attended this panel's discussions. The second thematic block touched the humanitarian issues and other problems connected to the instability in the Middle East. The third thematic block and its panel discussion focused on the changing geopolitical situation in the Middle East. The closing statement by Wolfgang Ischinger ended the third day of the conference and the conference itself.

To conclude, the Munich Security Conference showed that the world political elite and other notable actors of international politics do not take the growing threat of global terrorism, or the conflict in Syria and global security threats closely connected with it lightly. It is also worth adding that based on the statements of various state officials it was noticeable how each country really views current security issues and challenges. Mainly the debate of Prime Ministers on the second day of the conference emphasized the position of each country, in this case the countries of the Western world in comparison to Russia. Ironically, it was the Russian Prime Minister Medvedev, who emphasized the need for international cooperation numerous times, mainly in regards to finding a definite solution of the Syrian conflict. Nonetheless, Russia's actions were labelled as unacceptable multiple times throughout the course of the conference. These and similar statements proved that there is yet another growing rift between the West and Russia, which is reminiscent of a modern stage of the Cold War.