Towards Mutual Security: From *Wehrkunde* to the Munich Security Conference

Wolfgang Ischinger

Since its inception in the fall of 1963,[1] the conference we today call the Munich Security Conference has changed in many ways—not just in terms of its name. Yet in some ways, it has not changed at all. What was the main rationale behind the first conferences remains true today. Munich was, is, and will hopefully continue to be an important independent venue for policymakers and experts for open and constructive discussions about the most pressing security issues of the day—and of the future. These debates take place both on the podium and, crucially, behind the scenes, at the margins of the conference. Since its inaugural meeting under the name of *Internationale Wehrkunde-Begegnung,* the conference has built a unique reputation as a not-to-be-missed meeting for the strategic community, particularly for those from NATO member states. As Ivo Daalder, at the time US ambassador to NATO, remarked last year via Twitter, Munich is the "Oscars for security policy wonks."

The Munich Security Conference has attracted many of the West's leading practitioners and thinkers on security issues. In 2013, more than sixty

Wolfgang Ischinger opening day three of the 2012 Munich Security Conference

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foreign and defense ministers were in attendance, along with eleven heads of state and government. We have hosted United Nations secretary generals, heads of international organizations, the president of the European Council, vice presidents of the United States, and Nobel Peace Prize laureates such as Tawakkol Karman. Given the limited space at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof—the conference venue in the heart of Munich—and the few spots on the different panels, setting the agenda, inviting participants, and selecting the speakers is not always an enviable task. Yet it is a challenge we happily embrace.

Nonetheless, the participation of high-level speakers is not the only feature that makes the Munich Security Conference unique. Most importantly, there is a very special atmosphere that fills the corridors every year when decision-makers and experts from different fields of foreign and security policy invade the Hotel Bayerischer Hof. Where else do you find a couple of European ministers in a small corner of the rustic Palais Keller restaurant in the hotel's basement arguing—amicably, I should add—with Cathy Ashton over a beer, without protocol, without staff, without a preset agenda? Where else is the mix of high-ranking participants so diverse, and the physical space so limited, that you can hardly avoid running into officials whom you would rather not talk to? Where else can you see, just a few steps from the hotel, a head of government running into another leader right after one of them snuck out to buy a pair of *Lederhosen* and both having a good laugh about it? We may not spend much time during the MSC weekend celebrating *Fasching* anymore—as the attendees did in the early *Wehrkunde* years—but the event continues to be, despite so many official delegations, an informal event featuring Bavarian hospitality, and with the always welcome opportunity to sneak away for an hour or two into downtown Munich, right outside the door. Many of the foreign participants have also enjoyed coming to the conference for these very reasons.

In turn, the extraordinary commitment not only of the German government but of every single US administration and of key members of Congress has contributed enormously to the success and the reputation of the conference. For Germans, *Wehrkunde,* which literally translates as "military science," is a rather old-fashioned notion, but the fact that our US participants continue to refer to the conference as *Wehrkunde* underlines the powerful tradition of the institution. Over the years, the annual meeting has built lasting ties across the Atlantic, in many cases personal friendships. I am glad that the US commitment to the Munich Security Conference is as strong as ever. Last year, one full tenth of the US Senate attended the conference. Where else do you ever find ten senators—from both parties—in one

room together outside the United States? I very much appreciate the continued dedication by the congressional delegation, especially by its long-time leaders William Cohen, John McCain, and Joe Lieberman, who have all contributed personal essays to this book.

Moreover, it is certainly no coincidence that, in 2009 and in 2013, Vice President Joe Biden came to Munich for the Obama administration's first major foreign policy addresses of both the first and second term, and that Munich was the place Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta attended together in 2012 to try and dissipate European worries about the so-called rebalancing of the United States toward the Asia-Pacific. While the transatlantic security relationship will certainly change, US representatives have underscored in recent years that Europe remains America's most important partner in engaging with the world, which is why the conference will remain an important date in the calendar of our US allies. As Secretary of State John Kerry writes in his contribution to this volume, "President Obama's plan to rebalance our interests and investments in [the Asia-Pacific] region does not diminish in any way our close and continuing partnership with Europe."

Our participants come to Munich to talk—and to listen. The conference itself does not "produce" any direct "result," and this is actually a good thing. Since there is no need to agree on a final communiqué, participants are free to voice their views and explore their divergent opinions. This does not mean that the conference does not have an impact. On the contrary, contributions to this volume point out how some of the debates have had a major influence on a number of diplomatic initiatives. In contrast to many other diplomatic events controlled by protocol, the Munich Security Conference is a rather unregulated marketplace of ideas. Here, new or old proposals are floated—sometimes successfully, sometimes not. But if they are uttered here, they will be heard and not soon be forgotten by the community. One example among many: when NATO secretary general Anders Rasmussen proposed his Smart Defence initiative in 2011, he did so in Munich.

The annual meeting also often becomes a hub for diplomatic initiatives and the preparation for important decisions in response to crises. After all, it is hard to imagine a place where it is easier to get as many key players into a single room than here. In 2012, for example, informal UN Security Council deliberations essentially took place in Munich, as many key foreign ministers were present, arguing the merits of the proposed Syria resolution both on the podium and behind closed doors. And the essays contributed to this volume by Rudolf Scharping and Klaus Naumann, for instance, provide insight into the decisions relating to Kosovo during the 1999 conference.

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In addition, the MSC offers protected space for informal meetings between representatives from governments who might not be on the best terms but who may wish to meet informally, behind the scenes. Where else do you have the chance to see so many of your colleagues in one spot? Some ministers have been known to hold up to two dozen bilateral meetings over the span of a conference weekend.

Sometimes, foreign and defense ministers even use their joint presence in Munich to agree on and sign important bilateral documents. One particularly noteworthy example could be witnessed during the 2011 conference, when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton exchanged the instruments of ratification for the New START treaty in the Hotel Bayerischer Hof.

Increasingly, the conference also serves as a meeting place for a number of nongovernmental initiatives and events. For instance, important Track II initiatives such as the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative or the Global Zero Commission have met in the context of the MSC and presented reports, providing independent food for thought for the decision-makers present in the audience or the wider public. And side events like the "women's breakfast" or a CEO lunch provide unique opportunities to bring key people together.

Today, the debate about security issues involves an ever-increasing number of people. For the first decades of the Munich Security Conference, the participants did not hail from as many countries as they do today—and that was entirely by design. Back then, the audience was relatively small, not exceeding a few dozen people. While *Wehrkunde* was an international conference from the very beginning, it was first of all a venue where German participants met their counterparts from their most important ally, the United States, but also from other NATO member states. Mutual security at that time meant, first of all, shared security among the transatlantic allies. Debates in Munich concentrated on Western policy within the overarching framework of the Cold War confrontation. Long-time participants such as Lothar Rühl, Karl Kaiser, Richard Burt, Sam Nunn, and others describe some of these debates in this volume. The basic idea of *Wehrkunde* was to bring together decision-makers and experts from NATO member states to discuss and develop a common strategy *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Just like today, these intra-alliance debates were far from uncontroversial, at times even heated. Yet *Wehrkunde* was an important meeting place where differences could be voiced and mitigated, and where conceptual thinking beyond the urgent issues of the day had a place. As a result, the conference has often been dubbed the "transatlantic family meeting." It is a testament to the extraordinary work and personality of Ewald von

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Kleist, who sadly passed away in March of 2013, that it developed and kept such a high reputation. The Munich Security Conference will always be his conference. We will continue to honor his name by each year dedicating the Ewald von Kleist Award to a leader who has contributed to global peace and security.

When the Cold War came to an end, both von Kleist and his successor as chairman from 1998 on, Horst Teltschik, built on the unique character of this transatlantic meeting, but they also decided to invite participants from countries that had not been part of the Western world before. They made room for participants from Central and Eastern European countries that had begun their transition processes from Soviet-dominated state economies to liberal democracies with a market-based economy. As these countries made clear that they wanted to become a part of the West, where they felt they belonged anyway, they also became regular participants of the Munich conferences. But even beyond those states that would soon become members of NATO and the European Union, Kleist and Teltschik reached out to the successor states of the Soviet Union, notably the Russian Federation. They understood that the conference—much like NATO—had to move beyond the confines of one "side" of the Cold War if it were to remain relevant.

In fact, it is this ability to transform itself that a number of contributors to this volume see as one of the key reasons that the MSC's relevance has managed to remain so remarkably high. As US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel writes in his essay, "[t]he Munich Security Conference has stayed relevant for fifty years because of its ability to adapt to a constantly changing world."

Over the years, as the number and variety of important players in international security has increased, the circle of conference participants has continued to grow wider. At the same time, the core of the conference will always be transatlantic. It is sometimes said of NATO that it is not a global alliance but an alliance in a global world. The same is true for the Munich Security Conference. It cannot and will not become a global conference, but it has to be a conference reflecting a globalized world.

Today, we welcome high-ranking participants from key rising powers, such as China, Brazil, and India. They will have an important role to play in any future international security architecture. Moreover, I am glad that, over the past decade, the MSC has evolved into a meeting that allows both NATO member states and prominent representatives from the Russian Federation to address their respective grievances and to attempt to find more common ground. As such, both Vladimir Putin's speech in 2007 (as well as the reactions to it) and Joe Biden's "reset" speech in 2009 reflect the role of Munich.

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In this volume, Igor Ivanov, former foreign minister of the Russian Federation, and Frank-Walter Steinmeier reflect on the ups and downs of NATO-Russia relations.

In addition, in recent years, both the Arab uprisings and the debate about Iran's nuclear ambitions brought leaders from the Middle East to Munich, sparking both controversial arguments and the opportunity for further dialogue on and off the conference stage.

The audience today is not only more diverse in terms of geography, it also mirrors the broader understanding of security itself. Now, when the participants gather at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof, you still see military leaders—and rightly so. But you also see CEOs, human rights activists, environmentalists, and other leaders representing global civil society. Munich will not lose sight of its core themes belonging to traditional "hard security." We will continue to debate traditional topics such as regional crises, arms races, nuclear proliferation, the purpose and role of NATO, transatlantic burden sharing, or European military capabilities. However, current security policy is more than counting missiles and debating military doctrines. When the financial crisis hit our economies, I welcomed participants to the conference by saying that we would have to discuss "banks, not tanks" in the opening session. We have also invited specialists who inform our audience about issues such as cyber security, energy, or environmental challenges that affect our mutual security. Moreover, together with the Körber Foundation, we initiated the Munich Young Leaders program, bringing a group of younger experts and practitioners to Munich each year.

Another aspect in which today's Munich Security Conference clearly differs from *Wehrkunde* is the degree of transparency. The early meetings were held behind closed doors. Security policy, and NATO military doctrines in particular, were discussed by elites and often kept secret. Over time, the conference has become more transparent. For a number of years, the panel debates have been transmitted not only in parts by our broadcast partners, Bayerischer Rundfunk and Deutsche Welle, but also as a live stream on our website. Whereas space in the Hotel Bayerischer Hof itself is limited, this service offers the opportunity to everyone with access to the Internet to follow the debates in Munich. Increasingly, this will cease to be a one-way street. We have already welcomed input by our friends and followers on Facebook and Twitter and are confident that these new ways of interacting with the interested public can strengthen the social debate on security policy. In 2013, our hashtag #MSC2013 became trending on Twitter for the first time, with participants at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof commenting on the panel debates and interacting with people who followed the debates online.

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Of course, the increasing level of transparency does have its drawbacks. High-level speakers who know that their words will be immediately spread across the globe are understandably more careful about what they say. As a consequence, speeches may be less controversial than they used to be. However, given the technological advances, the public interest, and the number of participants, keeping the entire proceedings off the record would today be futile and next to impossible. With that said, we are mindful of the importance of smaller formats, which is why we have begun to introduce breakout sessions during the main conference. Similarly, we have initiated a number of smaller conferences throughout the year: the MSC Core Group Meetings held in a number of capitals around the world, bringing together roughly fifty high-level participants, as well as day-long events such as the Cyber Security Summit in 2012 and 2013 or The Future of European Defence Summit in April 2013.

Thus, as it turns fifty, the Munich Security Conference is evolving, and it is as alive and well as it has ever been. Instead of asking you to take my admittedly biased word for it, I would simply point you to the table of contents of this book. I am proud that the conference enjoys such a reputation that not only is it a must for so many to find their way to Munich each year, but that so many also found the time to contribute to this volume. The authors provide unique perspectives on the first fifty conferences held in Munich and on key security challenges that the international community has faced and continues to face.

In many ways, this is a book much like the Munich Security Conference, and the essays are much like the debates and speeches. Some are short, others long. Some focus on one or two concrete arguments or events, others span decades. Some refer in particular to the debates in Munich, while others frame a certain issue more broadly. A number of essays mostly look ahead—on key issues such as European security policy, cyber security, the "rise" of the Asia-Pacific, or the future of transatlantic and Euro-Atlantic security.

Finally, it is important to note that this is not, and cannot be, a work of history. The conference itself does not have an official archive dating back to the first meetings. The book does, however, aim to illuminate some aspects of the conference's history. You will be able to read a number of very personal, heartfelt reflections about *Wehrkunde* and Ewald von Kleist. A number of authors shed light on specific conferences, including the one held in 1999 just before the Kosovo intervention, and, depending on where you stand, highly publicized highlights or lowlights of the conference, such as the transatlantic crisis over Iraq, epitomized by the proceedings in Munich in 2003. I am delighted that former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who

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came to the conference for the first time in the mid-sixties, found the time to reflect on a number of key debates of the *Wehrkunde* era.

When the *Internationale Wehrkunde-Begegnung* first took place, mutual assured destruction and zero-sum thinking were the ideas of the time. The term "mutual security" could only be applied within NATO. Today more than ever before, the quest for "mutual security" is a global proposition. National interests will not suddenly disappear, and neither will those instances when states understand them too narrowly. Munich is a place where we can and should define and search for our common interests, understood as enlightened self-interest that thinks in win-win categories. As Poland's foreign minister Radosław Sikorski puts it in his essay, in the future "what defines a superpower will not be its weapons of mass destruction that can never be used or the ability to conquer and destroy. It will be the ability to combine and build, the power of mass innovation and mass teamwork based on flexibility, tolerance, and inclusiveness."

The conflict that helped give birth to the conference no longer exists, but that does not mean that the Munich Security Conference's reason to exist has become any less relevant. Quite the contrary: it may well be even more important in an era in which global governance in general, and international security in particular, is certain to become messier and more difficult to manage, and in which the transatlantic partners will have to both stick together as well as reach out to new partners.

*Ambassador **Wolfgang Ischinger** took over from Professor Horst Teltschik as chairman of the Munich Security Conference in 2008. His career in the German foreign service included positions as director of policy planning, as political director, and as state secretary (deputy foreign minister), followed by appointments as German ambassador to the United States and the United Kingdom. He is currently global head of public policy and economic research at Allianz SE, Munich.*

Notes

1 A quick note on why the 2014 meeting is the conference's fiftieth edition, although a 1963 founding might suggest 2012 would have been: a few years after the meeting was founded, one year was skipped when the conference date moved from late fall to early February. Moreover, in 1997, when Ewald von Kleist had indicated his intention to retire as chairman, the conference did not take place. In 1991, the planned and prepared conference was canceled at the very last minute due to the start of the Gulf War, but was always counted.

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