

Germany and the US need a new beginning in their security relationship



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In the snow-covered, fairy-tale city of Munich, global security leaders gathered for their yearly conclave, the Munich Security Conference, the Davos of foreign policy and power.

However, instead of Bavarian glory, tension was in the air. This participant repeatedly saw speakers talking past each other, creating an impression that this was not a dialogue about the fate of the world, but an absurdist theater spectacle by Eugene Ionesco.

Concerns abounded that the global security system has become unglued, that poor leadership East and West prevents cohesion, that the “strong street” overrules weak elites in Europe and America, and “the center cannot hold,” while the aggressive authoritarians: Russia, China, and Iran, eventually may not be contained.

NATO has been a linchpin of Western security for 70 years, and is crucial to preventing global chaos. Initially created, according to its first Secretary General Lord Ismay, “to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down,” today, NATO needs the Germans in more than ever.

Because of the rise of China, the threat of North Korean nukes, and U.S. domestic fatigue in the aftermath of two long wars, not to mention the trillions of dollars spent, growing budget deficits, and America’s changing demographics, rich and technologically advanced Germany needs to step up to the plate.

With NATO and other European security institutions including the EU and the consensus-driven Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/U.S. Helsinki Commission, fraying or fatigued, Berlin’s leadership and resources are now more essential than ever to both trans-Atlantic and European security.

The Loisach Group, which focuses on the U.S.-German strategic relationship, is a high-level gathering of practitioners and experts from Germany and the U.S., ably coordinated by Dr. Andrew Michta, Dean of the College of International and Security Studies at the George C. Marshall European Center in Garmisch, Germany.

At the Munich Security Conference, the Loisach Group brought together such heavyweights as Dan Hamilton of SAIS; Lieutenant General Ben Hodges (U.S. Army, ret.), former Commander of the U.S. Army Europe; former President of Estonia; Joseph Joffe, Publisher of *Die Zeit*; Alexander Vershbow, former Deputy Secretary General of NATO and U.S. Ambassador to the Russian Federation and South Korea as well as the former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; Celeste Wallander, Special Assistant to President Obama and Senior Director for Russia and Central Asia on the National Security Council after serving as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia; Robert Zoellick, the former President of the World Bank, Deputy Secretary of State, and U.S. Trade Representative, along with other veteran policy makers and experts.

The collective wisdom and experience crackled in the room. Yet, the bottom line after discussions was a general agreement that much more needs to be done in Berlin and Washington, and this is no time to rest.

Some Loisach members are concerned that the Christian Democrat-Social Democrat coalition, possibly Angela Merkel's last, will be even more unwieldy than its predecessor. At the Munich conference, Sigmar Gabriel, the exiting German foreign minister, called for a "European moment," a strong EU, and said that "we no longer recognize our America" under the Trump presidency.

Yet under his and the Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyden's tenure, Berlin did not meet the NATO 2014 Wales summit goals of 2 percent of military spending, which both Republicans and Democrats in Munich supported.

Some believe that it is more important that Germany invest in transportation infrastructure, including bridges and railroads, to move equipment east in case of Russian aggression against NATO members, than just build up its military. Yet, German rearmament already has started, sotto voce, albeit from a very low baseline. The Bundeswehr has fewer than 300 battle-worthy Leopard-2 modern

tanks and three dozen modern jet fighters. Russia, however, has thousands of tanks and aircraft.

NATO forces also urgently need secure communications in the FM band as well as upgraded, computerized artillery fire after the impressive Russian cannon and rocketry performance in Ukraine, boosted missile defenses, and massively upgraded cyber and information warfare capabilities.

Loisach Group members argue that to strengthen bilateral ties between the U.S. and Germany, expanded contacts between congressional representatives and staffs and members of the Bundestag and their staffs are required. Likewise, relationships between the media, expert communities, and civil society in both countries need to be fostered and broadened.

To keep our qualitative edge, the U.S. and Europe should also pursue joint projects in military and security applications of artificial intelligence, new propulsion systems, robotics, drones, big data, and biometrics.

We need to find someone of the stature of Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) to take over his leadership role and champion the trans-Atlantic alliance. It will take a special effort to convert the populist Trumpian Republicans and the far left of the Democratic Party to the cause of Trans-Atlantic cooperation. America First should not mean America alone. If America stands separately, we will all pay the price, and so will our friends and allies.

While many in Europe do not see China and North Korea as a threat, refuse to reconsider the Iran nuclear deal, and, like Mr. Gabriel, would like to weaken Russian sanctions, only in cooperation with the U.S. can Europe develop a viable and robust strategy for Asia, the Middle East, and Russia, and have a realistic global anti-terrorism role. We are all in this together, and one hopes that the Loisach Group can become the lodestar of U.S.-German strategic cooperation.

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