

Munich Security Conference steps up threats against Iran

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The Munich Security Conference has been held each February for nearly half a century. Presidents, government chiefs, military leaders, ministers and state secretaries gather in the Bavarian capital for two days to debate military and geostrategic issues.

Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the meeting was purely a NATO gathering. Since then, a Russian delegation has regularly attended, and this time Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi also participated.

The unofficial nature of the event is supposed to allow a “free exchange of opinions,” as the top diplomat Wolfgang Ischinger, who has led the conference since last year, stressed in his opening speech.

In the past, this openness meant that the official agenda served merely as a backdrop for a diplomatic war of words. Three years ago, then Russian President Vladimir Putin used the conference to launch a verbal attack on the United States government. He accused Washington of using its planned missile defence system as part of a policy of encirclement against Russia, reviving the Cold War.

The following year, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates attacked his NATO allies and demanded the Europeans bear a “larger burden of the fighting and dying” in Afghanistan. And last year, US Vice President Joe Biden took advantage of the Munich-based forum for a so-called “charm offensive” toward the allies, but tapped into the same line as Gates and demanded that it was time the Europeans abandoned their “pacifist reticence” and sent more troops to Afghanistan.

This year, the discussion was supposed to centre on the future of NATO and the Russian proposal for a “Euro-Atlantic security treaty.” However, the US

delegation, and particularly Senator Joseph Lieberman and former Republican presidential candidate John McCain, used the conference to make open war threats against Iran.

After a speech by Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who spoke about the Iranian nuclear programme, Senator Lieberman took to the floor and declared that the world community stood at a crossroads: “Either we enforce harsh economic sanctions and achieve our goal, or a military intervention is inevitable.” Senator McCain also stressed that the speech by Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki was “crying out for us to draw conclusions.”

German Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle supported this aggressive course. Iran was not only rejecting the outstretched hand of the West, but was beating it away, said the defence minister. Now the UN Security Council had to decide whether “the sanction screw should be tightened.” Westerwelle also argued for a “tougher line.”

The assertion that the speech of the Iranian foreign minister had provoked the participants is wrong. Minister Mottaki merely reiterated in Munich what he had said previously in several newspaper interviews: that Iran would not allow its right to peacefully use nuclear energy to be disputed.

In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Mottaki said Tehran needed enriched uranium to operate a research reactor for medical purposes. This had been declared to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In October last year, a framework agreement had been concluded with the IAEA, according to which Iran would export low-grade uranium to France and Russia in exchange for receiving

enriched uranium for its reactors. The details of the agreement with the Atomic Energy Agency were currently under negotiation. “The exchange has three main elements: date, location and quantity of uranium to be exchanged,” Mottaki told the newspaper.

The attack on Iran at the Security Conference was not a result of Mottaki’s speech, whose contents had long been known. It had been prepared beforehand and was part of a systematic campaign by the US government to force the Tehran regime to its knees and suppress all plans to establish a strong Iranian regional power in the Middle East.

Senators Lieberman and McCain spoke for those representatives of the US political establishment who fear that the growing resistance to the US occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan will weaken US influence in the region, and that the Iranian government would exploit this to strengthen its own influence. Both are in close contact with the government in Israel. Their constant accusation that Iran is playing for time and will soon have all the key components for the manufacture of atomic bombs serves to legitimize a military strike, which could be carried out against Iran by Israel.

The German government had agreed to this line before the security conference, and has been discussing the possible consequences for German corporations. *Die Welt* quoted Foreign Minister Westerwelle on February 7 with the words, “I have informed representatives of German business and industry that we are not able to exclude the extension of sanctions. I was then asked whether I knew what would be the cost. Yes, I know. But an Iran with nuclear arms would be much more expensive for German business and the world.”

Germany enjoys a leading role in trade with Iran. According to the Federal Office for Foreign Trade, Germany’s trade surplus with Iran in 2008 amounted to a considerable €3.3 billion.

Just a week before the Munich Security Conference, a joint Israeli-German cabinet meeting was held in Berlin, the first gathering of this kind in the history of both countries. Here too the main focus of discussions was stepping up sanctions against Iran.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu called for harsh and rapid international sanctions against Tehran, and Chancellor Angela Merkel said, “We have repeatedly made offers to Iran for reasonable

cooperation.” Unfortunately, Iran had still not responded, “so that we must consider the need for sanctions even more strongly.” Both stressed the good relations between Germany and Israel.

The accusations and attacks against Iran take on an increasingly threatening form and are strongly reminiscent of the propaganda campaign by the US government in 2003 that preceded the Iraq war. At that time, Washington also claimed that the Iraqi government possessed weapons of mass destruction, which thus justified the launching of an illegal war.

Significantly, a representative of Germany’s Left Party participated in the Munich Security Conference for the first time. While Lieberman and McCain dominated the event with their warmongering against Iran, as anti-war demonstrations were held outside the conference, Left Party executive member Wolfgang Gehrcke sat inside among the top military brass and political leaders.

A year ago, the chairman of the Left Party in Berlin, Klaus Lederer, had publicly supported the Israeli war on Gaza at a rally. Now, by his participation at the Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Gehrcke signalled that the German government could count on the Left Party in any future war adventures.



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