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UNITED STATES AND EUROPEAN STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES: MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE 2009

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Introductory Observations

United States and European perspectives on the global strategic challenges in the wake of President Obama assuming the US Presidency on January 20, 2009 emerged in focused contours at the Munich Security Conference held from February 6-8, 2009.

The Munich Security Conference has been an annual event since 1962 to provide a forum for airing and discussion of security issues besides providing an occasion for informal contacts on the sidelines. Initially, confined to the Atlantic alliance security issues, it has now for the last few years evolved as a global forum expanding to discussion of security challenges to the international community.

This year's Munich Security Conference acquired a special significance as it provided the US Obama Administration within two weeks of taking over, the first international forum to unveil its global strategic blueprint and its foreign policy priorities besides what was articulated by President Obama in his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2009.

Munich Security Conference 2009 also provided the first global forum for European leaders, to be precise, Germany and France to project their strategic perspectives and foreign policy priorities for the United States new Administration to note.

Russia's strategic blueprint and foreign policy priorities stood projected in a stirring manner by then President (now Prime Minister) Putin at the Munich Security Conference

2007, when he asserted Russia's resurgent foreign policy assertions. Those priorities continue as the Russian political leadership at the helm remains unchanged.

In terms of the global strategic calculus, it can be said, that Munich Security Conference 2009 was an opportunity for the United States and Europe to present their re-calibrated security and foreign policy responses in relation to United States global strategic challenges and Russia's resurgence.

This paper attempts to survey and analyze the Munich Security Conference 2009 deliberations under the following heads:

- United States Strategic Perspectives and Priorities
- Europe's Strategic Perspectives: Priority Focus on Russia's Strategic Inclusiveness
- Russia's Strategic Priorities Unchanged Since 2007
- Overall Analytical Observations on Munich Security Conference 2009
- Concluding Observations

United States Strategic Perspectives and Priorities

The United States has normally been represented in the past by its Defense Secretary to articulate and discuss US policies. In a marked departure the Obama Administration chose that USA this time be represented by the new US Vice President Joe Bidon.

The US Vice President headed an unusually high level delegation including, US National Security Adviser General James Jones, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, US C-in-C Central Command General David Petraeus and the US Special Envoy for Afghanistan & Pakistan Richard Holbrooke besides US Senators/Congressman.

In terms of what one may call outlining a US global strategic doctrine, the US Vice President in his 45 minute address highlighted the following aspects: (1) USA's new foreign policy will accentuate diplomacy over use of military power (2) USA determined to set a new tone in Washington and in America's relations with the world (3) USA maintains that today physical security and economic security are indivisible (4) "There is no conflict between our security and our ideals. They are mutually reinforcing. The force of arms won our independence and throughout our history the force of arms has protected our freedom. That will not change. United States is still prepared to use force to protect our national security."

Following in the same vein, Biden asserted that the United States "will draw upon all elements of our power – military and diplomatic, intelligence and law enforcement and cultural – to stop crises from occurring before they are in front of us. In short we're going to attempt to recapture the totality of America's strength with diplomacy."

Russia was the focus of both European and American strategic attention at this Conference. The United States approaches and policy towards Russia was made clear in

the following terms: (1) The United States would attempt to halt the dangerous drift in relations with Russia (2) United States would accord high priority to President Obama's policy to "reset" the button with Russia (3) In an oblique reference to Russia's sensitivities on its peripheries it was asserted that USA "will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence" (4) Yet on a placatory note, Biden declared that "Our Russian colleagues long ago warned about the rising threat of Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Today NATO and Russia can and should cooperate to defeat the enemy."

United States references to Middle East, Iran and Afghanistan will be discussed in the 'Analytical Observations' below.

Europe's Strategic Perspectives: Priority Focus on Russia's Strategic Inclusiveness

The German Chancellor and French President made their keynote addresses before that of the US Vice President. This was in keeping with the theme of the plenary session, namely "NATO, Russia, Natural Gas and Middle East: The Future of European Security".

German Chancellor, Angela Merkel made the following points: (1) The year 2009 was a litmus test for the international community (2) Concept of networked security was the appropriate response to crises and wars and their prevention in 21st Century (3) Concept of networked security should be reflected in new NATO strategy. At the same time NATO must be the place for political deliberations.

French President Sarkozy adopted a wider canvas and asserted that (1) International cooperation for security and prosperity in 21st Century should not be limited to Europe and North America, but should include the emerging nations in Asia and South America (2) France did not believe that Russia posed a threat to European Union or NATO (3) Re-rapprochement of Europe with Russia was an imperative for European security (4) New confidence with Russia needs to be established (5) France believes that the new international architecture should be globally based and incorporating Russia by re-engagement (6) The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) would be a suitable framework.

Russia's Strategic Priorities Unchanged Since 2007

Russia was represented by Deputy Prime Minister Ivanov. In view of the Russian strategic blueprint asserted in Munich Security Conference 2007 by then President Putin and there being no change in it, Russia seems to have decided against sending new Russian President Medvedev or Prime Minister Putin.

Russia then in a resurgent mode had declared that Russia was not prepared to accept a unipolar global strategic structure and Russia's intention to emerge as an independent

global centre of power. That has been followed through as reflected in this Author's 2008 SAAG Papers on Russia.

US Vice President Biden did have discussions at Munich with the Russian Deputy Prime Minister. The United States had initially declared and so reflected by Poland and the Czech Republic at this conference that US would go ahead with the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) plans in Eastern Europe. It transpires now that by the time the Russia-US meetings took place at Munich, there seems to be a watering down of the position to that more discussions would take place with friends and allies before USA proceeds ahead with the BMD plans.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister after the meetings at Munich between the two sides remarked that Russia welcomed the change in US stances.

Overall Analytical Observations on Munich Security Conference 2009

Analysis of the deliberations, assertions and media coverage leads one to the following major observations:

- Russia more than Middle East, Iran or Afghanistan was the focus of strategic perspectives of the United States and Europe.
- Strategic perspectives of the United States and Europe on Russia differed in terms of policy emphasis.
- Europe's major nations were clear that no international security architecture would be workable without inclusion of Russia in global security and global strategic management
- United States approach to Russia was sending mixed signals and of selective engagement.
- United States was keen to enlist Russian support in Afghanistan and fundamentalist terrorism but not ready to accede to Russia's strategic sensitivities elsewhere.

Iran, Middle East and Afghanistan were referred to by the US Vice President in terms of greater NATO commitment and support, but it was not echoed by the European nations.

On Iran, the United States once again reiterated that American policy on Iran was conditional on its giving up its clandestine nuclear weapons program. Contrary to media speculation before the Conference, no direct discussions took place with Iran by the US side on the sidelines of the Conference. Hence no dramatic changes in US policies on Iran seem to be in the immediate offing.

The United States had nothing new to offer on Afghanistan other than its resolve to stabilize it with a troops surge, a call for a greater commitment to Afghanistan by NATO countries and the oft-repeated declaration that Pakistan was indispensable for the war effort in Afghanistan. However, there was a US call on Russia to assist in the liquidation

of Taliban and Al Qaeda from Afghanistan. This is a first time significant assertion by USA.

The United States would have been well advised to have asserted that to stabilize Afghanistan the United States would also "reset" the button on Pakistan and discipline its "double-timing" of the United States.

China did not figure prominently in any manner at this Conference at all. This may be a deliberate strategic shift.

South Asia airing of views at Munich was minimally marginal by Pakistan Foreign Minister on Indo-Pak peace and Indian National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan as a panelist in a discussion on Nuclear Disarmament.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai touched on the need for a dialogue with the Taliban.

Russia, in the estimation of this Author, was a smug observer at this Conference, more intent on listening to the re-calibrated approaches of USA and Europe in their foreign policy towards Russia. The strategic inevitability of all this must have been very satisfying to the Russian leadership.

Concluding Observations

The Munich Security Conference 2009 took place within two weeks of President Obama's inauguration on January 20, 2009. Hence, the United States could not and should not have been expected to make forceful definitive policy assertions on meeting the global challenges to security.

The United States, therefore utilized this forum to plant pointers of its strategic perspectives and foreign policy priorities. It would take time to concretize its policies.

However, this Conference presented an effective forum for first time policy contacts and discussions between the Obama Administration and Europe and Russia.

Russia was the cynosure of both the United States and Europe's strategic perspectives at Munich Conference 2009 and as has been constantly projected in this Author's SAAG Papers on Russia in the last few years that no stable and effective global strategic management can be undertaken by the United States without co-opting Russia as a strategic equal. President Obama's decision to "reset" the button in America's Russia policy therefore is timely and commendable.

Finally, while the United States may have reasserted that the Obama Administration would depart from earlier US policies and depend more on diplomacy, the US assertions made at this Conference, and quoted above, should leave no doubts that the Obama Administration would not hesitate to use the totality of America's awesome strengths to protect its national security interests.