A Reflection of the Defense Industry's Role in German Security

11 DECEMBER 2023
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Berlin Security Conference Report

On November 29th, the 22nd Berlin Security Conference (BSC) was held in the capital of Germany. It is one of the largest European security and

defence policy events. It is organized by the 'Behörden Spiegel' – a monthly national newspaper for the public sector in Germany.

The first day of the Berlin Security Conference (BSC) featured a diverse range of speeches and panel discussions addressing critical issues in international security. Jörg Vollmer, Gen (ret.) and Behörden Spiegel Strategic Adviser, along with Wolfgang Hellmich, MP, Congress President BSC 2023, welcomed the participants. The Opening Ceremony included speeches from Katja Keul, Minister of State for the German Federal Foreign Office, and Marcel de Vink, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Keul emphasized Germany's commitment to addressing the Israel issue seriously, describing it as a war of necessity. She highlighted the importance of sustainable security through political processes, identified Hamas as a terrorist organization, and expressed concerns about the risk of regional escalation. She outlined Germany's approach to security through Zeitenwende, advocating for NATO and EU collaboration, arms control, and an integrated approach to the world order. She emphasized the significance of the transatlantic relationship, committing to a 2% budget for Bundeswehr and supporting Ukraine. Keul urged the EU to be more decisive as a security provider, addressing civil protection, crisis management, cybersecurity, and economic resilience.

Following the opening ceremony, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, Olga Stefanishyna, delivered a keynote speech. The subsequent high-level debate on the future security structure in Europe featured speakers from Norway, the Netherlands, Latvia, Finland, and Ukraine. They discussed the war in Ukraine, defence industrial production, security guarantees, military support, and the challenges posed by Russia, China, and grey zone conflicts.

The conference continued with keynote speeches from Dr Roy Chun Lee (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan) and Stefan Thomé (CEO of Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH). Dr. Roy Chun Lee discussed Taiwan's security challenges, including persistent PLA violations, cyberattacks, and China's influence on Taiwanese elections.

Until now, the conference has managed to address the most pressing international security issues of the last few months, combined with high-level speakers and everything before lunch. However, something else distinguishes the BSC from other public sector conferences: The advertisement. Whoever attends the Berlin Security Conference for the first time cannot help but notice the ongoing product fair that is strategically placed around the lunch buffets. Here you can eat, while you are looking at product placements and lobbyists from TAURUS GmbH, DIEHL Defence, Lockheed Martin or Lufthansa Defense. Some participants may have even gotten a queasy feeling enjoying their mushroom risotto next to an MDBA Enforcer ammunition, 'effective against lightly armoured static and moving

targets, targets behind cover, and against targets at long range also in urban environments', according to their website.

It is certainly naïve to believe that Germany can address all of the pressing security challenges above without the defence industry. German security needs the defence industry, and the defence industry needs German security. It is the very same IRIS-T SLM model by DIEHL Defense whose 'big brothers' are saving lives in Ukraine every day.

In the afternoon, panel sessions covered topics such as strategic communications, energy and critical infrastructure, comprehensive territorial defence, military use of the space domain, EU, NATO, and trans-Atlantic defence procurement, security implications of climate change, and health care as part of a comprehensive national defence strategy.

The day concluded with a special forum on security for Israel, featuring Aaron Sagui (Minister Counsellor of the Israeli embassy), Prof Dr Hans-Gert Pöttering (former President of the European Parliament), and Dr Burkhard Meißner (University of the Federal Armed Forces). The discussions revolved around Israel's right to defend itself, the role of Hamas, and the need for a resolution to the current conflict. It was a lively discussion with certain points of disagreement, but everybody agreed on Israel's right to self-defence.

It is not without a certain irony that on the panel on strategic communications, Colonel Dr Markus Reisner (Austrian Armed Forces) claimed that 'we are losing the capability to convince our people', while minutes later, simultaneously to the Israel-Palestine panel, there was a pro-Palestine protest taking place in front of the venue. Their banner reads 'Genocide is not Self-Defence – End the Occupation', a wording that can be noticed in many recent protests across Germany.

The second day of the conference began with an engaging welcome and opening session. The day's events were marked by keynotes, insightful discussions, and high-profile interviews, showcasing a diverse range of perspectives and expertise in defence and security matters.

The morning commenced with keynotes from prominent figures such as Boris Pistorius, Federal Minister of Defence for Germany, and Kajsa Ollongren, Minister of Defence of the Netherlands. Major General Jörg See, Deputy Assistant Secretary General at NATO, offered a comprehensive speech followed by a Q&A session, providing valuable insights into international security affairs.

One of the highlights was the high-level interview focusing on the Southern Flank and Black Sea, featuring Nana Brink in conversation with Undersecretary of Defence for Political Affairs, Martinez Núñez (Spain), State Secretary of Ministry of National Defence, Simona Cojocaru (Romania), and Parliamentary State Secretary, Siemtje Möller (Germany). This session shed light on critical regional dynamics and perspectives.

The panels during the afternoon covered a wide array of topics, from military assistance for Ukraine to the integration of new weapon systems

into NATO's Air Power, maritime battlespace management, multi-domain operations, NATO force model, and the use of artificial intelligence in the military domain.

Each panel related to weapon systems had representatives from the public sector and from the defence industry. The industry's message is clear: 'The technology is there, the policy is the problem, simply deregulate and Germany will be safer'. The military officials rarely disagree. Here it is again, the queasy feeling that the MDBA Enforcer ammunition caused before. A feeling that probably most German participants whose parents protested against the deployment of American nuclear missiles in Germany had. Germany needs the weapon industry, but does that make it necessary to deregulate?

The conference further delved into the Indo-Pacific challenge during a high-level forum chaired by Petra Sigmund, featuring representatives from Germany, the Netherlands, Korea, Japan, and Australia. The insights shared highlighted the geopolitical complexities and the importance of collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region.

The closing ceremony, led by Wolfgang Hellmich and General (ret) Jörg Vollmer, served as a fitting conclusion to a day filled with insightful discussions and exchanges of knowledge among leaders, experts, and stakeholders in the defence sector. A successful event to gather expertise and network, which any student of peace and security should attend as a reflection on how we approach the defence industry.

At least since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it is clear that Germany needs the defence industry. However, that does not mean that they bear no corporate responsibility for their actions. It is easy to go from one extreme to another, but the industry is neither entirely evil nor good. Perhaps, a stronger public-private partnership is needed to steer them in the right direction. Contrary to their marketing, the defence sector is not the benevolent saviour of Ukraine, but they are needed to save Ukraine.