
The Virtual Reality of Empire

The Munich Security Conference debated NATO's future, but did not challenge London's scenarios for geopolitical chaos.

Several weeks ago, one would still have thought that the 44th International Security Conference, an event held every February in Munich, would become a platform of heated exchanges, not over the Iraq War and Iran, as in years past, but this time over the threat posed to the West by the collapse of its own financial-economic system.

Such an agenda, especially one that provided a platform for discussions about real-economic alternatives to the collapsing monetarist system, would have been in the genuine interest of the 40 participating countries. Six months of protracted and intensifying banking crises since July 2007, threaten the West with destruction on a scale that could never ever be achieved by the terrorists or "rogue nations" usually talked about.

But during January, all of a sudden the war in Afghanistan became the main focus of attention. That has to do with the attempt by think-tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, to divert public attention in the NATO member-states away from the primary crisis issue—the financial collapse—and to fix attention on a virtual issue—the alleged "existential test for NATO in Afghanistan."

Alarming memoranda were suddenly mailed by the defense establishments in London and Washington to the other NATO allies, warning of a "split of NATO" if allies did not join the "decisive" round of combat against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan, and if allies did not provide the surge in troops required for that. All of those communications also called on governments and

political leaders not to pay attention to the majority views of their own populations, who are mostly against these wars, but to focus on the alleged "challenge" posed in Afghanistan.

That was also the message that U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates brought to the Munich conference, speaking of those allies that "enjoy the luxury" of keeping their troops in relatively, peaceful parts of Afghanistan, while the Americans, British, and Canadians are "fighting and dying" in the southern Afghan combat zone. Gates said so, although he ought to know perfectly well what the majority of military experts are saying: that the war in Afghanistan is lost, and should never have been started, more than six years ago.

Gates also called Germany, where the idea of deploying new troops has met opposition across the political spectrum, "over-sensitive." What Gates said did not originate in the United States, but in the British imperial model of conflict manipulation, as revealed in his own Munich speech. Gates explicitly called for a revival of the London-designed post-FDR confrontationist paradigm of the Truman era, recalling that 60 years ago, Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, went before parliament to discuss the Soviet Union and other threats to the United Kingdom. Among all the kindred souls of the West, Bevin said then, there should be an effective alliance, bound together by common ideals for which the Western powers have twice in one generation shed their blood.

"Less than two months later," Gates

continued, "President Harry Truman stood in the United States Congress and echoed that sentiment. He said: 'The time has come when the free men and women of the world must face the threat to their liberty squarely and courageously.... Unity of purpose, unity of effort, and unity of spirit are essential to accomplish the task before us.'"

Unfortunately, Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, who otherwise gave an interesting speech on Russia's economic policies in Munich, did not address the issue of the financial collapse, either. He presented many aspects of the "Russia in 2020" program, outlined by outgoing President Vladimir Putin at a session of the State Council in Moscow on Feb. 8. As for how U.S. relations to Russia should develop in general, Ivanov made reference to Putin's meeting with President Bush and his father in Kennebunkport, Maine, last Summer, and to the long tradition of the two nations working together for the good of the world.

"The process of Russia's revival objectively combines our ambition to occupy an appropriate place in world politics and commitment to maintain our national interests," Ivanov stressed. "I would like to make a point: We do not intend to meet this challenge by establishing military blocs or engaging in open confrontation with our partners.... This strategic targetting is entirely consistent with the new perception of the world by the Russians who now are confident of their potential and, consequently, are capable of thinking globally."

Lyndon LaRouche commented that the Munich Conference, which in previous years has featured major initiatives for good or ill, such as that of Putin in 2007, or the McCain-Lieberman duo in 2002, appears to have sunk into virtual irrelevance. The European nations are giving up their sovereignty, and have little to say.