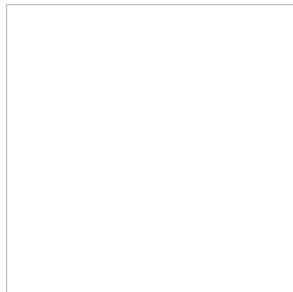


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Energy – an underestimated security factor



Business



Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger (top), Chairman of the Munich Security Conference, and Energy Security conference co-host. Germany's former ambassador to the United States opens the conference, outlining a far-reaching hypothesis. Dr. Günther Nonnenmacher, publisher of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, speaks on behalf of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Forum, co-host of the Energy Security conference.

An energy security conference discussing ways of ensuring our fuel supplies was an eye-opener for many

By Rainer Bieling

August 23, 2013

When The German Times appears as a media partner for an energy security event hosting decision-makers and knowledge multipliers from Europe, the Middle East and Asia, you can be sure that the gathering deals with an issue of great interest to Germany. The recent Frankfurt conference entitled "Energy Security – How to Feed and Secure the Global Demand" demonstrated that Germany and the entire European Union face a challenge, which our political leaders are not yet fully aware of.

The Energy Security conference was held at the Gesellschaftshaus Palmengarten in Frankfurt on July 10, 2013 and hosted by two organizations which stand for competence and sound judgment in the field of security: the Munich Security Conference (MSC), and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Forum, a subsidiary of the respected daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ).

For 50 years, the MSC has been hosting the international Munich Security Conference, at which the partners in NATO talk with world leaders from around the globe. The FAZ has played a prominent media role in Germany since the newspaper's founding 64 years ago, providing news, in-depth analysis and forthright commentary.

Thanks to the prestige enjoyed by the two organizing institutions, attendees included parties who do not normally seek public attention. From the People's Republic of China came the Deputy Director General of the Energy Research Institute, Professor Wang Zhongying, who discussed the security of power supplies assured by the mining and burning of environmentally damaging coal in his country. The Islamic Republic of Iran sent its Minister of Petroleum, Rostam Ghasemi, who was challenged to explain why oil-rich Iran insists on enriching uranium – seen as a threat by the international community because enriched uranium can be used to build nuclear warheads.

Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, Chairman of the MSC, made it clear from the start that the invitation to the Iranian delegation had been issued with a clear intent. Two key issues, he explained, were not mutually exclusive: on the one hand, the international community's determination to enforce the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty with all means at its disposal, starting with the current economic sanctions, and on the other hand, the willingness to reach out to a more flexible Iran, which does not flout the will of the international community. Ischinger said both approaches were clearly compatible as both are aimed at a positive outcome of the conflict.

But Iran is not the only important actor in the Gulf. The American military presence is still massive there, although two developments seem to decrease the US interest in the region. One is president Obama's pivot to Asia. The other, as FAZ publisher Günther Nonnenmacher pointed out, is fracking, the new method of extracting oil and gas from shale, which in the United States has led to an energy revolution with far-reaching consequences.

The "shale revolution" has drastically cut the cost of fuel production. It will soon make the US energy self-sufficient. The country is expected to become a net exporter of oil and gas. This will diminish America's commitment in the Gulf and could portend the end of US involvement in the region. This would have a potentially disastrous effect on Europe, which would remain heavily dependent on Gulf oil.

But what if the US dismantles the security shields which Europe shelters behind? Will the nations still heavily dependent on Arab oil then buckle when someone in the Gulf region starts rattling his sabers? Ambassador Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, Head of the Mission of the League of Arab States in Vienna, was able to refute this concern.

The Energy Security conference provided a wake-up call. Europeans, and with them the Germans, have to face the fact that energy security in the Gulf might one day be no longer guaranteed by the US. The European Union would then have to step in. In the wake of the euro crisis. This might make a mayor upgrading of European armed forces imperative.

Next year, a second Energy Security conference will provide more clues as to what the Germans and other Europeans need to do sooner rather than later to ensure that their energy supplies remain reliable.

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