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Redefining International Cooperation in a Changing World: Reflections from the Munich Security Conference 2026

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Key Reflections from Munich:

- Claims that multilateralism, international cooperation, or the ‘rules-based order’ are over do not accurately reflect today’s landscape. The evolution needs to focus on examples that work and can be scaled.
- Real progress comes when analysis is granular; identifying specific mechanisms, incentives, and partnerships that produce real results.
- Defeatist narratives limit our ability to build future, energy, economic, and development corridors.
- In order to talk about resilience with confidence, alignment across markets, supply chains, and innovation ecosystems are key.
- The focus must be on leveraging comparative advantage to strengthening policy dialogue and committing to transparent communication across partners.
- Geopolitics is reshaping markets, energy systems, and supply chains, but how we respond matters as much as the shocks themselves.
- Development outcomes are no longer peripheral to security, but rather central to it.

From discussions on energy supply chains and economic corridors to heated conversations about the future of multilateralism, the debates in 62nd Munich Security Conference captured how deeply interconnected global risks and responses have become.

A Renewed Transatlantic Moment

This year’s Munich Security Conference opened against a noticeably different backdrop from last year’s.

Across opening remarks and high-level interventions, a clear acknowledgment emerged: **the United States and Europe need each other**, not only for security, but for trade, investment, technological leadership, and the advancement of research and innovation.

This is a shift in rhetoric from divergence to **mutual dependence**.

Moreover, it is also a rather pragmatic message compared to last year. Now, there is a realization that **fragmentation** carries economic and strategic costs, while **coordination** reduces uncertainty for the entire global system.

Overall, the conversations suggested a growing readiness for the US and Europe to work together, on energy security, industrial policy, critical technologies, and investment frameworks, recognizing that **shared challenges require shared solutions**.

If sustained, a renewed transatlantic engagement can serve as an important anchor of predictability in an increasingly volatile world, because *in order to talk about resilience with confidence, alignment across markets, supply chains, and innovation ecosystems are key*. Geopolitics is reshaping markets, energy systems, and supply chains, but how we respond matters as much as the shocks themselves.

Continued calls for a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine, growing strategic attention to regions such as Greenland, and the devastating conflict in Gaza where the challenge goes beyond immediate humanitarian needs to the imperative of reconstruction; all underscored a shared reality: insecurity carries profound human, economic, and developmental costs.

Are Multilateralism & International Cooperation Over?

Claims that multilateralism, cooperation, or the 'rules-based order' are over do not accurately reflect today's landscape.

Instead of broad declarations of decay or “wrecking-ball politics,” we need to ask *what aspects of cooperation are under stress, and where they are working well*.

And this is what we need to focus on. Replicating what works.

At Munich, the focus was rightly on *how systems deliver under pressure*, whether in security, energy, economic interdependence, or climate responses. The question for leaders today is not whether cooperation exists, but **what forms it takes, and how it can generate measurable results for people on the ground**.

Multilateralism Is Evolving, Not Expiring

And the presence of this debates *itself* affirms that multilateralism is **undergoing transformation**, not obsolescence.

Security frameworks, economic partnerships, environmental agendas, and regional architectures are all being reimagined to meet contemporary challenges.

So what is needed is not nostalgia for a past order, but **adaptive cooperation**:

- **Leveraging comparative advantages** by aligning strengths of different countries and sectors.
- **Enhancing policy dialogues** via structured engagement that anticipates risk instead of merely reacting.
- **Transparent communication** for clear expectations among governments, private sector partners, and institutions.
- **Multi-stakeholder delivery mechanisms** that link financing, governance, and implementation.

This means shifting from abstract declarations about systems being “dead” to **amplifying examples that work**, and learning from them.

Defeatist narratives limit our ability to build future, energy, economic, and development corridors.

Development, Growth, and Jobs as Core Pillars of Security

One of the most important shifts at this year’s Munich Security Conference was the recognition that *development outcomes are no longer peripheral to security, but rather central to it.*

Discussions on energy corridors, supply chains, and geopolitical power repeatedly returned to a simple reality: **security frameworks that do not generate growth, jobs, and opportunity will not be sustainable.**

Energy systems, transport corridors, and mineral supply chains are not only strategic assets, but also engines of economic transformation.

And when designed well, they crowd in private investment, strengthen domestic value chains, and create employment across skills and regions. When designed poorly, they deepen inequality, heighten social pressure, and amplify fragility.

Growth and job creation must therefore be treated as strategic outcomes, not secondary benefits.

Development finance, private capital, and public policy need to work together to ensure that energy security and economic corridors translate into **productive capacity, competitive industries, and opportunities for people, especially youth.**

However, translating this growing consensus into impact requires moving beyond generalizations toward a more granular assessment of which policies, partnerships, and instruments actually deliver results on the ground.

Toward a More Granular Global Agenda

At its best, Munich brought focus to not just *what* is broken, but *why* and *how* it can be fixed. *Real progress comes when analysis is granular; identifying specific mechanisms, incentives, and partnerships that produce real results.*

For example, when international financial institutions (IFIs) craft financing instruments that blend concessional capital with private investment, when policy frameworks align with national development goals, and when infrastructure projects are designed with both climate and local economic benefits in mind, **we see durable interdependence.**

Emerging and developing economies must not merely adapt to global change; they must help **shape it. This requires greater voice, agency, and representation**, not only at fora like Munich but in the institutions and systems that govern investment, trade, and security.

A Forward-Looking Vision, Not a Fixed Narrative

The narrative is *not static*. Change is constant, and our responses must be equally dynamic.

If we want a future with sustainable energy security, resilient development pathways, and inclusive economic systems, we must build **international cooperation that delivers measurable impact**, not simply proclaim it.