

Competing Forums for Global Security Dialogue: The Munich Security Conference and the Minsk Conference post 2022

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This paper examines the evolution of competing international security dialogue platforms through a comparative analysis of the Munich Security Conference (MSC) and the Minsk Conference (MC) during 2023–2024. Using Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett’s Security Communities framework and Charles Tilly’s network configurations concept, it analyses how these forums represent distinct approaches to organising international security dialogue. The study demonstrates how the established MSC and the emerging Minsk Conference develop different institutional practices, governance structures and engagement patterns. While Munich emphasises multilateral engagement within a rules-based framework, Minsk promotes an alternative model centred on state sovereignty and Eurasian integration. This comparison reveals an emerging divide between Western and Eurasian approaches to international security dialogue, indicating a broader transformation in global security relations.

Keywords: international security, security communities, Munich Security Conference, Minsk Conference, institutional competition, network configurations, multilateral dialogue, global security architecture, security forums, international relations

Introduction

The global security environment has undergone significant changes in recent years, notably marked by the emergence of competing international security discussion forums. This evolution reflects broader transformations in the global power dynamics, where traditional Western-led frameworks increasingly face alternative structures and perspectives.

The coexistence and parallel development of the Munich Security Conference and the Minsk Conference exemplify this shift, illustrating a growing institutional competition in how international security dialogue is structured and conducted.

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This paper analyses these forums through the lens of institutional competition, examining how they operate as parallel dialogue-based security platforms. Both the Munich Security Conference and the Minsk Conference function as structured international dialogue mechanisms, though they represent competing visions for organising security discussions. This institutional competition manifests in their different approaches to multilateral engagement, regional focus and conceptualisation of international order.

As dialogue-based security platforms, both forums share key institutional characteristics: they function as recurring high-level meetings that facilitate multilateral security discussions, engage diverse international stakeholders and aim to shape global security discourse. This common institutional format enables a comparative analysis of how they develop competing approaches to international security dialogue.

These platforms represent an evolving form of multilateral cooperation that follows what Charles Tilly calls “network configurations” – distinct patterns of how international actors connect and interact.² Tilly’s framework helps us understand how these forums create distinct patterns of interaction: Munich develops complex multilateral networks with multiple connecting points, while the Minsk builds more hierarchical relationships centred on state-to-state connections.

While traditional institutions rely on fixed structures, these security forums create more flexible networks of relationships. This networked approach, where participants can form various types of connections “across boundaries”, may indicate how international cooperation could develop in the future. These forum-based interactions may increasingly supplement (or perhaps replace) traditional institutional structures.

The Security Communities framework provides the analytical structure for examining how these forums develop distinct governance patterns and shape security practices. This theoretical lens helps analyse how dialogue platforms establish shared understandings, build trust networks and develop collective identities. Through this framework, we can observe how network-based cooperation patterns emerge in international security dialogue, potentially indicating new forms of multilateral engagement.

In addition, these forums explicitly position themselves as actors shaping world order. The Munich Security Conference, founded in 1963, emphasises its global role through a Euro-Atlantic perspective, while the Minsk Conference, established in 2023, presents itself as a regional Eurasian platform. Their institutional philosophies reflect distinct cultural-historical traditions: Munich embodies Western multilateral traditions, while Minsk represents Eurasian approaches to international cooperation. Both platforms increasingly engage with Global South perspectives, indicating evolving dynamics in international security dialogue.

The present study examines how the Munich Security Conference and the Minsk Conference function as platforms that shape international security discourse and practices. Drawing on Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett’s (1998) framework for analysing security communities, this paper explores how these forums, while distinct from formal international institutions, serve as venues for the articulation and contestation of competing security perspectives.

² ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 403.

Specifically, it examines how the Munich Security Conference and the Minsk Conference represent and promote different views on global security architecture and what their development in the course of 2023 and 2024 indicates about changing dynamics in global security discussions.

This study identifies three key aspects to address this question:

First, the Munich Security Conference and the Minsk Conference demonstrate distinct security concepts and different approaches to international security. These forums operate similarly to what Adler and Barnett call “loosely coupled security communities” – platforms where participants develop shared understandings about security through regular dialogue and interaction.³

Second, the distinct formats of the Munich and Minsk conferences reflect fundamental differences in how they build what the security communities literature identifies as “many-sided and direct relations”,⁴ with Munich representing established Western frameworks while Minsk offers an alternative Eurasian-centred viewpoint.

Third, the development of the two parallel conferences reflects what Adler and Barnett describe as different “governance structures” that rely on “shared goals and intersubjective meanings” rather than formal enforcement mechanisms.⁵

These observations enable a multi-dimensional analysis of “institutional competition” among these forums. The Munich Security Conference prioritises transatlantic partnerships and the defence of a rules-based international order (RIO) increasingly with the ambition to engage with stakeholders globally. In contrast, the Minsk Conference emphasises Eurasian integration and advocates for an alternative security framework that directly challenges Western paradigms.

Importantly, as Adler and Barnett note, such communities can exist “in the absence of well-developed strategic ties or a formal alliance”, but they develop through “tacit and/or formal normative prohibitions against states settling their disputes through military means”.⁶

This study employs a comparative analysis of conference materials from 2023–2024, scrutinising both ex-ante materials (pre-conference reports) and ex-post documents (conference outcomes and summaries). This technique seeks to evaluate how different forums recognise security issues, engage participants and promote their unique perspectives on international order.

As global security challenges grow increasingly complex and interrelated, this analysis of rival institutional frameworks provides insights into the future direction of global security discussions and their implications for international order.

³ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 30.

⁴ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 31.

⁵ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 35–36.

⁶ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 35.

Historical context and evolution

The historical development of these forums illustrates how security dialogue platforms evolve through what Adler and Barnett term “phases of development”⁷ – from nascent to mature stages of institutional formation.

Development of the Munich Security Conference

The Munich Security Conference was first held in 1963. In its early stages, the Conference served as a platform for Western defence officials and analysts. The primary aim was to align NATO members’ defence policies and enhance transatlantic collaboration. During its six-decade span, the MSC has experienced a considerable evolution. It has evolved from a relatively small assembly of defence experts (often dubbed a “transatlantic family meeting”) to the prime forum for dialogue on global security policy. The organisational framework of the MSC has become increasingly complex. Currently, it operates through an annual principal conference in February, as well as year-round initiatives like regional conferences, working groups and research initiatives. The conference functions as an independent organisation, adopting a public–private partnership framework, which has considerably expanded the range of its initiatives. Initially, the conference featured close to 60 attendees, primarily from NATO states, but it has now broadened its scope to nearly 1,000 participants from more than 100 countries.

The MSC’s framework integrates a variety of stakeholders, bringing together viewpoints from both the private sector and civil society. While maintaining its core mission of strengthening the transatlantic alliance, the MSC has significantly expanded its objectives to include facilitating broader international security dialogues, promoting the rules-based global order and addressing global security challenges.⁸

The Munich Security Conference’s evolution from 1963 to the present demonstrates the transformation of a security dialogue platform. Initially a small assembly of NATO defence experts, it has developed into the premier forum for global security policy discussions, expanding from 60 to nearly 1,000 participants from over 100 countries. This evolution reflects what Adler and Barnett identify as the development of “many-sided and direct relations” through increasingly complex institutional frameworks.

Emergence of the Minsk Conference

While the MSC represents the evolution of established Western security frameworks, the Minsk Conference emerged post-2014 as an alternative platform, illustrating how new security dialogue venues can develop in response to changing global dynamics.

⁷ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 30.

⁸ ISCHINGER et al. 2014.

The Minsk International Security Conference was established in October 2023 to provide a Eurasian forum for security dialogue. While Belarus had previously hosted various international meetings since 2014, this conference marked a formal institutionalisation of its role in regional security discussions. The development has progressed through several critical phases: it transitioned from an emphasis on European security discussions to a more expansive Eurasian security framework, ultimately serving as a counter-platform to Western forums. The conference has further evolved from an initial dialogue platform to a more structured forum for developing alternative security architectures, as evidenced by its formalisation into an annual event with expanding participation from 30 countries in 2023 to over 40 countries and regions in 2024.

The Minsk Conference has its unique institutional characteristics, in particular, its annual high-level conference fundamentally reflects a state-centric approach. It sustains substantial connections with regional security groups, including the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), while also participating in broader Eurasian projects.

The conference has also demonstrated growing alignment with wider non-Western initiatives, particularly China's Global Security Initiative (GSI), reinforcing its role in shaping alternative security frameworks.

The participation designs exhibit a distinctive orientation: attendees predominantly come from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Nonetheless, there has been a significant rise in both the size and scope of participation, including greater representation of Asian states and the Global South, along with selected engagement – from the geographic standpoint of Belarus – of Western countries such as Hungary. This broadened scope underscores a significant emphasis on “Global Majority” representation and comprehensive security, which includes military, political, economic and informational dimensions.

The strategic aims of the Minsk Conference present a divergent perspective from its Western counterpart. It advocates for a multipolar international order, contests Western security structures and fosters Eurasian integration. Furthermore, it establishes alternative security narratives, cultivates non-Western alliances and advocates viewpoints of the “Global Majority”.

Parallel evolution 2023–2024

The timeframe of 2023–2024 represents an important phase in the development of both forums. The MSC has broadened its global engagement while maintaining a robust emphasis on transatlantic unity. Simultaneously, it has increased its focus on Global South perspectives. The Minsk Conference has at the same time reinforced its alternative security narrative, increased its emphasis on regional collaboration, expanded its participation base and solidified its anti-Western position. The Minsk Conference's transformation from a regional dialogue platform to a structured forum for alternative security architectures

demonstrates how dialogue platforms can develop distinct “governance structures” based on different sets of “shared goals and intersubjective meanings”.⁹

This comparative historical analysis illustrates the evolution of these forums from basic discussion platforms to a more structured manifestation of different perspectives on international security architecture. Their parallel development suggests broader changes in the global system and a growing challenge to Western-centric security frameworks.

Comparative analysis

While the historical context provides background understanding, this study focused specifically on 2023–2024, as this period offers the clearest evidence of dialogue competition between these forums. This timeframe captures both the Minsk Conference’s emergence and Munich’s strategic adaptation, providing rich comparative material for analysing competing approaches to security dialogue.

Institutional positioning and core narratives

The fundamental contrast between these forums emerged clearly in their self-positioning. The Minsk Conference established itself as an explicit “Eurasian alternative to the Munich Security Conference”, as articulated by the CSTO Secretary General,¹⁰ while Munich maintained its role as “the world’s leading forum for debating international security policy”.¹¹ This positioning reflects more than institutional rivalry – it demonstrates contrasting perspectives on how international security should be discussed and managed.

These contrasting institutional positions manifested in their different approaches to dialogue format.

Evolution of dialogue formats

Munich’s Approach. The 2023 Munich Conference demonstrated its established multilateral format through unprecedented attendance and extensive bilateral engagement.

The conference facilitated 2,750 official bilateral meetings and hosted the largest bipartisan U.S. Congressional delegation in its history,¹² exemplifying its inclusive multilateral strategy.

The conference’s focus on Western unity was evidenced by the first “G7 Foreign Ministers meeting in Munich under Japanese presidency”.¹³ This approach highlights

⁹ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 35.

¹⁰ TASS 2024a.

¹¹ MSC 2023: 24.

¹² MSC 2023: 5, 19.

¹³ MSC 2023: 5.

an “inclusive multilateral” strategy, aimed at enhancing current European security frameworks through comprehensive stakeholder participation.

Minsk’s Alternative Model. In contrast, the Minsk Conference developed a more selective, state-centric approach.

The Minsk Conference convened over 150 international attendees from 30 nations who participated in the discussions and approximately 300 delegates from Belarusian and foreign think tanks, and governmental bodies took part in the conference. Its format emphasised governmental participation and regional frameworks, with the Belarusian Foreign Minister, the conference host, articulating a direct challenge to Western frameworks: “West-centricity is a thing of the past, its place is taken by multipolarity.”¹⁴ This argument not only challenges Western frameworks but also indicates the rise of alternative security frameworks, highlighting a profound structural divide in global security dialogue mechanisms. This position sharply challenges the assertions made by numerous participants at the Munich 2023 Conference, who consistently emphasised a rules-based international order grounded in transatlantic cooperation and liberal democratic principles.

The different dialogue formats reflect what Tilly identifies as contrasting network configurations: Munich’s approach creates multiple interconnected relationships (triadic connections), while Minsk’s state-centric model emphasises bilateral relationships (chain configurations).

The forums’ distinct formats evolved further as they adapted to changing global conditions.

Adaptation to global changes

Munich’s Strategic Evolution. Munich’s adaptation shows how established security forums can evolve their practices while maintaining their fundamental principles. Following Adler and Barnett’s concept of maturing security communities, the MSC demonstrates how security platforms can adjust to global changes while preserving their core values and expectations.

The 60th anniversary of the Munich Security Conference in 2024 featured significant developments in scale and scope, gathering nearly 1,000 participants, including 45 heads of state or government, from 109 nations across 60 sessions in the main program. Over half of the speakers were female, and more than a quarter were from the Global South.¹⁵

The conference theme “Lose–Lose?”, derived from the title of the event’s “scene-setter” report, reflected growing concerns about global fragmentation. Nonetheless, it also cultivated a sense of optimism for achieving outcomes, “seizing silver linings” among “dark clouds”, concentrating on pragmatic crisis management and inclusive dialogue.¹⁶ This illustrates efforts to preserve the consistency of established European security

¹⁴ Belarus MFA 2023a.

¹⁵ CARR–KOENIG 2024: 1.

¹⁶ CARR–KOENIG 2024: 4.

frameworks while recognising new threats to the current system. The revised strategy was apparent in the immediate response to significant incidents during the summit, such as Navalny's death and the taking of Avdiivka by Russian forces, which prompted urgent discussions and enabled the G7 Foreign Ministers to reiterate their "unwavering resolve to continue to support Ukraine".¹⁷ The Conference also aimed at achieving concrete results, exemplified by "twenty technology firms signing an agreement to jointly prevent deceptive Artificial Intelligence content from interfering with global elections".¹⁸

Minsk's Alternative Vision. Minsk's emphasis on state sovereignty and regional frameworks illustrates what Adler and Barnett describe as the development of alternative "shared understandings" in security communities. Its approach represents the formation of distinct institutional practices that challenge established security dialogue norms.

The Second Minsk Conference reinforced its distinct approach through emphasis on state sovereignty and regional frameworks. Hungarian Foreign Minister Szijjártó's emphasis on "sovereignty as the key word today" exemplified the forum's alternative narrative approach to security dialogue.¹⁹

This attitude, demonstrated by various speakers in Minsk, which emphasises state-centric dialogue and regional frameworks, directly contests the post-Cold War European security architecture. This indicates not merely different formats but also conflicting perspectives on the conduct of European security discussions.

The Second Minsk Conference was remarkable for the presentation of divergent viewpoints, exemplified by Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Vulin's assertion that "the absolute lack of international law is the biggest problem in modern conditions".²⁰

This sentiment was further reinforced in December 2024, when Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that certain EU countries had expressed interest in the new Eurasian security framework proposed at the Minsk Conference. Lavrov emphasised that "the process of building a new architecture of security is moving forward full steam, and is already based not on the Euro-Atlantic concept". He attributed the need for this new architecture to what he described as the destruction of "indivisible security" proclaimed in the OSCE, "first and foremost, thanks to NATO's reckless eastward expansion".²¹

These divergent adaptations reflected each forum's broader approach to establishing their role in international security dialogue.

Institutional competition and legitimacy building

Both forums developed distinct strategies for building legitimacy. Munich expanded its scope while maintaining focus on European security frameworks, addressing "major challenges that disproportionately affect the Global South". Minsk built legitimacy through institutional coordination with regional organisations and direct challenges to Western

¹⁷ CARR-KOENIG 2024: 2.

¹⁸ CARR-KOENIG 2024: 4.

¹⁹ Radio Svaboda 2024.

²⁰ Belarus Segodnya 2024.

²¹ TASS 2024b.

paradigms, that is the rules-based international order and multilateral engagement model traditionally promoted by Western institutions.

This contrast is evident in their specific approaches to legitimacy-building. The “institutional rivalry” among the forums was evident in Munich’s approach of increasing the range of involvement in the security dialogue, tackling what its organisers recognised as “the superlative number and breadth of crises and challenges”.²² This broadened scope, while keeping the focus on European security frameworks, illustrates Munich’s effort to modify its established dialogue structure in response to growing global challenges, all the while preserving the core principles of the post-Cold War security order. This encompassed, among other topics, concentrated discussions on climate, water and food security, and technological problems, emphasising that “major challenges that disproportionately affect the Global South must be tackled”.²³

Minsk’s strategy for dialogue and legitimacy is characterised by a focus on state-centric coordination and purposeful selective engagement. This emphasis underscores an important challenge to the Western security dialogue model, as it proposes an alternative framework that prioritises state sovereignty and regional power dynamics over multilateral cooperation. This is illustrated by the forum’s organisational composition which underlines the need for governmental involvement, as noted by the Belarusian Foreign Minister who stressed the need for “holding a serious summit of heads of state of the Eurasian countries to discuss the future architecture of Eurasian security”.²⁴

The legitimacy of the Minsk forum has been supported by institutional coordination, demonstrated by the involvement of other regional organisations, including the CSTO, CICA and SCO. Furthermore, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Vulin’s assertion regarding the “complete absence of international law” and the necessity for “a new moral consensus”²⁵ further illustrates Minsk’s strategy to establish legitimacy by directly challenging Western paradigms.

These different institutional practices demonstrate how Tilly’s network configurations manifest in practice: Munich’s “multilateral engagement” creates dense networks of interconnected relationships, while Minsk’s “selective sovereign” approach builds more structured and hierarchical relationships between participants.

Narrative development and strategic positioning

The institutional competition between these forums manifested not only in their legitimacy-building approaches but also in their evolving narratives from 2023 to 2024.

The narrative development of the forums from 2023 to 2024 demonstrates their differing paths. In 2023, the dialogue in Munich predominantly emphasised robust Western solidarity, exemplified by the expression “as long as it takes” in its backing

²² CARR-KOENIG 2024: 1.

²³ CARR-KOENIG 2024: 3.

²⁴ Belarus MFA 2023b.

²⁵ Belarus Segodnya 2024.

of Ukraine. This previous position showed a consensus-driven approach to European security, based on transatlantic cooperation and shared democratic principles. In 2024, Munich's discourse transitioned to facing uncertainties and various crises, as illustrated in its debrief paper about Western support for Ukraine amid "symptoms of fatigue and an increasing politicization of military and financial assistance".²⁶ This change implies not just practical issues but also fundamental questions regarding the sustainability of established European security arrangements in an increasingly multipolar world.

Meanwhile, Minsk changed its narrative focus from regional integration toward a more distinct alternative vision to RIO and a sharpened anti-Western sentiment, also with an increased adoption of the "Global Majority" viewpoints. This is exemplified by the statement of Sergei Lavrov, who explained that the current trend of the formation of a multipolar world order "promotes the democratization of international relations, in which there should be no hegemony of anyone and where the principles of the UN Charter should be observed in a comprehensive and not selective manner [...], [and] that Russia's vision of Eurasian security corresponds to the [China's] GSI".²⁷

The move from a regional platform to an alternative global dialogue forum, as illustrated by the CSTO Secretary General's clear view of Minsk as an alternative to Munich, poses a significant challenge to established European security frameworks and institutions.

The simultaneous development of these forums exemplifies not only competing institutional structures but also fundamentally divergent concepts of European and global security architecture. Munich aims to preserve and improve current global structures to address emerging challenges, whereas Minsk promotes a different model centred on state sovereignty and regional power relations. This increasing disparity indicates a significant structural divide in the conceptualisation, organisation and governance of international security, with substantial implications for the future of global security dialogue.

Conclusions

This analysis confirms our three key observations regarding the evolution of security dialogue platforms. The contrasting security concepts and approaches of Munich and Minsk demonstrate what Adler and Barnett describe as different types of "governance structures".²⁸ Munich's structure builds on multilateral engagement and Western institutional norms, guiding participants to work within a rules-based international framework. In contrast, Minsk's structure emphasises state sovereignty and regional power dynamics, encouraging participants to prioritise national interests and Eurasian integration.

The contrast between Munich's promotion of a "rules-based international order" and Minsk's support for "multipolarity" and "Global Majority" perspectives indicates fundamentally differing opinions on the organisation and governance of international security. In addition, they represent more than competing platforms – they exemplify

²⁶ CARR-KOENIG 2024: 4.

²⁷ Xinhua 2024.

²⁸ ADLER-BARNETT 1998: 30.

different ways of constructing what Adler and Barnett term “shared identities, values, and meanings” in international security.

The forums’ distinct approaches to security dialogue, particularly regarding European security, reflect fundamental differences in how they build – what the security communities literature identifies as – “many-sided and direct relations”.²⁹ Munich’s “inclusive multilateral” model emphasises extensive stakeholder engagement and transnational networks, while Minsk’s “selective sovereign” approach prioritises state-level discussions and regional frameworks. This distinction goes beyond format and reflects competing visions of how European security discussions should be structured and maintained.

The parallel evolution of the conferences from 2023 to 2024 demonstrates how they developed different foundational principles to security dialogue. Munich’s transformation from Western solidarity to acknowledging diverse global threats, alongside Minsk’s development from a regional platform to an alternative global forum, shows how security dialogue platforms develop different sets of “shared goals and intersubjective meanings”.³⁰ This competition between Munich and Minsk reveals how fundamentally different their visions are for organising and conducting international security dialogue.

This study points to emerging research directions regarding Global South/Global Majority influence in international security dialogue. While current demographics show numerical dominance of these regions, complex factors like China’s declining fertility rates and aging population suggest future shifts in Global Majority dynamics.³¹ The contrasting approaches of Munich and Minsk to Global South engagement reflect broader questions about evolving power distributions in international security discussions. Demographic transitions in key Global Majority countries may significantly impact future security dialogue configurations.

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²⁹ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 31.

³⁰ ADLER–BARNETT 1998: 35.

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