



Remarks of PfPC Executive Director on the ***Relevance of History to Current Decision Making*** to the PfPC Euro-Atlantic Conflict Studies Group, Kosice, Slovakia 27 September 2021.

A warm welcome to all here from the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes. And a big thanks to our host Colonel Miloslav Caplovic, Director of the Slovak Institute of Military History, and to the German Center of Military History who also helped organize this event. Thanks also to all the other institutes who sponsored us and to Carmen Rijnoveanu and Madj Medvecky for their key roles behind the scenes. I am delighted to be here today with you in this beautiful and historic city.

All too often-- when national leaders sit around a table and make important decisions-- 2 chairs are missing: the scientist and the historian. Leaders would be well served to include scientists and historians at the policy table, and indeed they incur a strategic disadvantage if they don't.

The increasing impact of science and technology on nearly every aspect of our lives strongly affects our decisions. Clearly, scientific input to policy decisions is useful and generally welcome, but it is not always asked for by leaders. It should be.

As for the historian, some contend that this time around, things are different, that history has lost its relevance in the modern era of transformational change. People sometimes feel that anything that happened before they were born is old news and not pertinent to their lives. They are wrong.

As you all know very well, history is not only chronology and commentary. Historical analysis encompasses psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, military strategy and other fields. Historians are interdisciplinary, with broad and deep knowledge of both past and current events. History is not just old books about bygone eras. History includes thirty seconds ago.

It's true that wars and other conflicts are not new under the sun. Events do indeed repeat themselves in the grand sweep of history. But when threats change, and battlefields change, and weapons evolve, this does not negate the importance of historical analysis. On the contrary, identifying patterns over time becomes increasingly important.



There's also the human factor in the historical equation. This human factor is not different this time around in terms of human motivations, drives, emotions and the choice to define, counter and/or embrace good or evil. The interactions of human beings, not some blind course of history, usually determines whether there will be war or peace.

The message I'd like to leave with you today is that history is integrally relevant to the security challenges we face today. Knowledge of historical errors and successes are critical to shaping optimal responses of decision makers to current and impending threats. In this context, I view the work of the *PfPC Conflict Studies Working Group* as an important asset in our national security knowledge base.

One question we should ask ourselves is why historians have not been more recognized by leaders for the contributions they could make to today's policies. Could it perhaps be due to an understandable focus on academic investigation, research and teaching rather than on efforts to participate actively in significant policy decisions? Could it be hesitancy to express controversial or dissenting views in the current social atmosphere where controversy sometimes brings disproportionate sanctions? Could it be a question of marketing and presenting clear, concrete and actionable options to decision makers?

If we want to be heard – and we have important things to say – we must speak out. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us here today to communicate our perspectives – regardless of whether they conform to popular wisdom – clearly and consistently to the policy community.

PfPC provides opportunities for this communication. Please take advantage of them. It is hoped that your outreach in many forms will help policy makers avoid the mistakes of the past and will bring to the policy table important insights affecting decisions that shape our collective future-- a future that is happening now.

Thank you.