

European Strategy, European Defence, and the CSDP

Food for Thought Paper

Which responsibilities does the EU want to assume as a security provider, both inside and outside its borders? What level of military capacity does that political ambition necessarily entail? And what does that mean for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)? These are some of the most important questions to be answered by the future EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy that the European Council mandated High Representative Federica Mogherini to draft.

The first thing that the Global Strategy would have to address is which responsibilities Europeans need to assume as a matter of priority. Assessing Europe's shared vital interest, the security environment, the linkage between internal and external security and the practice of past and current European engagements, four priorities emerge:

- (1) To take the lead in stabilizing Europe's broad neighbourhood, including the neighbours of the neighbours, because no other actor will do that for us;
- (2) To contribute to global maritime security, which is of vital interest because 90% of European trade is seaborne;
- (3) To contribute to UN collective security, for the EU needs an effective UN when it deems intervention necessary itself (as today in Libya);
- (4) To contribute to the internal and border security of the EU.

A clear statement of ambition along such lines would give a sense of purpose to EU defence efforts and would be very welcome to Europe's allies and partners, who would then know which contribution from Europe they can look forward to. These are also the responsibilities which the EU, when necessary, has to be capable of assuming alone, without being dependent on its allies and partners, precisely because these responsibilities concern vital interests.

Setting out these priorities in the EU Global Strategy does not necessarily imply that in crisis situations Europeans will only act upon them through the CSDP. Depending on the case at hand, Europeans may choose to have recourse to NATO, or to form an ad hoc coalition. But these priorities for sure will have to be on the radar screen of the EU and of every security organization in which Europeans are engaged.

The EU only ever addressed part of what a European military strategy should cover, and even that has now been overtaken by events. The 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal is a deployment target rather than a strategy, though the five illustrative military scenarios that were developed to translate it into detailed capability requirements offer some elements. But the Headline Goal limits the level of ambition to sustaining

up to a corps (60,000 troops) for a least one year, an arbitrary figure which is related neither to what the armed forces of the 28 Member States (still 1.5 million troops!) should actually be capable of nor to the needs that the security environment imposes. And the scenarios cover only a limited spectrum, not including tasks and types of operations in which the EU is already engaging, such as naval operations and cyber security.

The Global Strategy presents an excellent opportunity to go beyond the limits of the Headline Goal and to introduce an EU Defence White Book. This would serve to translate the level of ambition defined in the Strategy into capabilities and capability development. The guiding element would be the ability of the EU countries collectively, and autonomously, to live up to the four priorities mentioned above. The EU should at least in its own extended neighbourhood be able to do so without recourse to US assets – and thus relying on its own strategic enablers. The collective capability requirements identified in the White Book should then be fed into individual countries' multi-year defence planning systems. The Global Strategy could set a deadline for such an implementation document or White Book.

For the Europeans, these capability requirements would also form the basis for collective capability development under the aegis of the EDA, notably to develop European strategic enablers. Those states that so desire could at the same time further integrate their defence efforts in smaller clusters. These will create maximal synergies and effects of scale if they change the mind-set and instead of doing national defence planning and then exploring opportunities for cooperation, they move to multinational planning and then decide what each will contribute. A core group of EU Member States could thus still create a de facto Permanent Structured Cooperation even though this mechanism is unlikely to be formally activated any time soon.

The Global Strategy should indeed be global: it is logical that a strategy by and for the High Representative covers her entire remit. But within that remit, defence is a crucial component.

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