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EGMONT

Clingendael Report

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Cover photo: Soldiers carrying the EU flag for the starting ceremony of the European Parliament term 2014-2019.




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# European Strategy, European Defence, and the CSDP

## Introduction

By June 2016 the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy will have been submitted to the European Council. The new strategy will be prepared by High Representative Federica Mogherini in close cooperation with member states and with the involvement of civil society. The Luxembourg EU Presidency launched the initiative for starting consultations on the place of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in the future EU strategy. With that aim in mind the Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations and the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' organised an expert seminar in Brussels on 14 October 2015. The Belgian Royal Higher Institute for Defence hosted the event.

This report reflects the main topics discussed at the seminar. It is neither a verbatim record nor a summary of the debate. Rather, it lists key issues which need to be addressed in the new strategy, with a particular focus on CSDP. The report is divided into three sections. The first part focuses on the challenges for the EU stemming from the changing strategic environment. The second section looks into the question of what the EU's level of ambition should be in response to those challenges. The third part looks at the consequences for CSDP in terms of the scope and character of operations but also what a White Book on CSDP should entail. The report closes with a list of issues which will require further discussion during the next steps in the consultation process for the new strategy.

An Egmont-Clingendael Food for Thought paper was sent to participants ahead of the seminar. It is attached to this report.

## The EU's Challenges

The EU's security environment has changed and deteriorated significantly over the past decade. In the coming years the EU member states will be faced with the implications of two trends in particular. First, the shift of power away from Western dominance has resulted in an international system that is increasingly characterised by multipolarity. Second, states are more and more confronted with challenges of non-state actors and diffuse transnational threats necessitating a broadened concept of security. These trends manifest themselves in various ways.

On the global level major powers are asserting their place in the international system and establishing spheres of influence. In the process, the Western-dominated multilateral arrangements are being challenged. This makes it increasingly difficult to secure governance of the global commons, in particular the maritime and cyber domains. Tensions between the United States and China over these areas are increasing. As the global economic and political centre shifts towards the Asia-Pacific region, the EU's stake in seaborne trade and secure sea lines of communication increases. At the same time, Western military-technological dominance vis-à-vis other major powers is no longer guaranteed.

Some of the direct implications of multipolarity are felt in the EU's extended neighbourhood: a band ranging from West Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Central Asia up to the Arctic. These 'middle spaces' in between the regional and global levels constitute the main avenues of communication between the Asia-Pacific region and the European neighbourhood, but they are also zones which are contested by regional and global powers. Risks in these areas include interstate conflict, proxy wars, anti-access 'bubbles' and maritime piracy.

In its immediate neighbourhood, Europe has to take on security challenges on two fronts. To the East, Russian revisionism presents a challenge to both the EU and NATO. With the United States being increasingly focused on the Asia-Pacific theatre, the European countries collectively will need to step up their autonomous capacity to provide conventional deterrence and a comprehensive response to the threat of hybrid warfare. On the Southern flank, direct challenges stem from political turmoil and civil conflict, in particular in Syria and North Africa, generating regional instability, terrorism and refugee flows. Political and demographic trends suggest that these issues will remain a challenge for the foreseeable future.

Internally, the EU faces the challenge of the nexus of internal and external security and the combination of civilian and military security elements, transcending borders and institutional divisions. Although the EU is uniquely positioned as a comprehensive security provider, it faces the problem of institutional stove-piping and the lack of streamlined decision-making. As this is currently coupled with a political climate that is not conducive to European cooperation, which may even result in renationalisation, maintaining the EU's unity is among its biggest challenges.

## Level of ambition

Politically, the level of ambition of the EU is about which responsibilities it is willing to take on. Formulating these should bring clarity to where its priorities lie in its foreign, security and defence policy goals. The EU's level of ambition can be seen in several

ways, for example in terms of geographic priorities of its foreign and security policy. But priorities can also be defined thematically.

*Geographically*, some argue that a realistic policy should focus on the EU's neighbourhood, while others point out that many security issues have a global dimension and that the connectivity of the globalised world means that foreign and security policies should be addressed at that level. A possible solution to this dilemma is to depart from the strict distinction between the neighbourhood and global spaces with the concept of 'middle spaces', where the EU has the potential to engage with major powers and be influential in global issues. Examples of 'middle spaces' are the Arctic, Central Asia (think of the revitalisation of the Silk Road) and the Indian Ocean. In this view, the EU's neighbourhood will be a major point of focus, which will require the EU to act autonomously. However, ambitions need to differentiate between East and South because of the different challenges they present. For the East, the EU's ambition in deterrence and addressing hybrid warfare must be defined. For the South, there needs to be a level of ambition for 'active' preventive engagement and regional capacity building, as well as for the EU's 'reactive' policies: clarifying the amount and intensity of interventions, stabilisation operations and state-building operations it should be capable of performing.

The discussion of ambitions should not be completely tied to geography. *Thematic* ambitions need to be identified as well, such as for maritime security, cyber security and the rules-based global order. Global maritime security directly serves Europe's interests and the EU should take its share of responsibility for it. Space is not very prominent in the debate, but should not be ignored. The EU should strive towards making effective use of the many instruments at its disposal, via policies in energy, trade, agriculture, development aid and security or via the extensive diplomatic network available to the EU and the member states. Realism and ambition are both required: we need to work from 'what we can do' and push it towards 'what we should do'.

## Consequences for the CSDP

So far, the CSDP has been the EU's tool for external crisis management, encompassing military and civilian aspects. The new security challenges, in particular to Europe's East and South, raise the question whether 'crisis management only' should continue to be the CSDP's aim. Insecurity at the EU's borders is bringing CSDP closer to European territory – as is already visible with Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean. External and internal security have now been interwoven in practical terms. In the East the CSDP might also have to play a role in dealing with the hybrid threats emanating from Russia, in addition to NATO's prime responsibility for territorial defence.

If the CSDP operates closer to Europe, what would that entail for its use in the 'neighbourhood', the 'neighbourhood of the neighbourhood' or even beyond in the wider world? The future global strategy is likely to prioritise the neighbourhood as the area for which the EU will have to bear specific responsibility. On the other hand, the 'middle spaces' or even the 'global commons' might also require CSDP contributions – albeit most probably of a different nature than crisis management operations in the neighbourhood. Maritime security plays a central role here and will require naval capacities.

Another issue is the character of CSDP operations. Up until now EU military deployments have been at the low to medium end of the spectrum, and in recent years there has been a shift to capacity-building through training and other forms of assistance. However, insecurity in the wider Middle East and North Africa has grown with higher levels of intensity, which might require EU member states to operate in higher levels of the spectrum, and to undertake more operations concurrently than has so far been the case. Should the EU be better prepared (and equipped with the required level of firepower) for such operations in order to stabilise the situation on the ground, after which the UN or regional organisations could take over? Or should the focus continue to be on stabilisation operations and capacity-building as part of the comprehensive approach? And how will contingencies demanding higher intensity intervention then be addressed?

For all operations the European countries will need to have the enablers which will allow for the deployment and sustainment of military forces in CSDP and NATO operations alike. There are still significant shortfalls in areas like air-to-air refuelling and intelligence, command & control and strategic reconnaissance. Clearly, these remain absolute priorities for European capability improvement. Obviously, EU-NATO complementarity in capability development remains a crucial issue. But the new strategy also raises the question of EU-NATO relations in a much wider sense, for example how both organisations should synchronise their cyber defences and responses to hybrid threats.

The new strategy will be global and oriented towards foreign and security policy. It will most likely define the consequences for CSDP in general terms. Therefore, a follow-on exercise might be required: the elaboration of a CSDP sub-strategy or a White Book (albeit perhaps under a different title). Such a White Book should address, amongst other things: the type of operations the EU should be able to conduct; the required capabilities to deliver the related ambition levels; how to realise more firm commitments on the part of the member states; synchronisation or integration with non-military security-related capacities (dual use, civil-military) and using financial incentives; and the relationship with the European Defence and Technological Base.

## Issues for further discussion

### Level of ambition

- global vs. neighbourhood and the role of the 'middle spaces' (geographical priorities)
- thematic approaches (the wide set of EU instruments)
- a differentiated approach (the how & when of using all available instruments)
- realism in terms of goals and objectives
- improvement of decision-making

### CSDP (military aspects)

- the ambition level in terms of the type and number of operations ('what to do')
- geographical priorities ('where to go')
- the required military capabilities ('how to do it')
- the desired process: a White Book ('how to get there') to address i.a. required operations and capabilities; increasing commitment; using the EU's full potential (civ./mil.); the linkage with the EDTIB; the relationship with NATO
- a different title for the White Book.

## Appendix 1 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 stabilising 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 organisation 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 2 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.