The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 51
Number 2 *Current Issue: Volume 51 Number 2 (2021)*

Article 6

Summer 5-18-2021

Europe: A Strategy for a Regional and Middle Power

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ABSTRACT: As the European Union deals with yet another crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic—it must adopt a grand strategy based on unity, policy, and proportionality: cohesion over inaction, policy over process, and regional imperatives over global ambitions. An analysis of past strategy documents and a study of current international trends stress the need for a Union capable of shaping its own environment rather than reacting to it. The pandemic should accelerate Europe's journey toward power maturity and responsibility.

By nature and temperament, the European Union (EU) is not well suited for grand strategy. Norms and rules are its vocabulary, not power and interests. Yet the evolution of the international system toward a loose, multipolar configuration compels Europeans to assume more responsibilities, notably in security and defense. In this endeavor, the EU should build internal legitimacy, seek proportionality between ends and means, retain some modesty in ambition, and prioritize its neighborhood before advancing its interests among distanced great powers.

As a cluster of supranational institutions, the EU is indeed a very special entity: a monetary union, partial thus suboptimal; a classic alliance, at least in the Treaty of Lisbon; and a permanent forum for managing a substantial portion of the daily lives of 450 million people. The Union is designed for rule-based consensus, cooperative behaviors, and prudential decisions. Collectively the EU remains a strategic dwarf.

Will the coronavirus pandemic represent one crisis too many, or, on the contrary, will it trigger successful reform efforts toward a more integrated and efficient Union? Between a terminal stage of irrelevance and a federal union, the most likely scenario, as is often the case with the EU, will probably be another kick of the can further down the middle road—enough to keep the Union alive, not too weakened but not too ambitious either.

According to polls, Europeans are more aware of the need for a stronger EU, yet they remain highly doubtful of its capacity to deliver.[1] Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the essential challenge remains roughly similar: moving from a recognition of weakness to

1. Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, "Europe's Pandemic Politics: How the Virus Has Changed the Public's Worldview," Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, June 24, 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/europes_pandemic_politics_how_the_virus_has_changed_the_publics_worldview.

a position of strength. Notable improvements—painful for some—have been made in economic and monetary governance. Progress has been slower, however, in the security and defense sectors in which the historical division of labor—some nations adopt hard power while the EU as a whole relishes soft power—has remained largely untouched.

Preexisting Conditions

The EU was built on three models: solidarity, democracy, and economic governance. All three models have been in crisis for most of the last decade. Europe's 2015 migrant crisis nearly broke the European modus operandi of solidarity. Europe's democratic foundation has been threatened by the rise of populist political movements, and in some cases, by increasingly autocratic governments discarding independent judiciaries or refusing to safeguard respect for minority rights. The past few years have shown economic growth to be distributed unequally among Europeans, not only within societies characterized by increasing social inequalities, but also among Eurozone member states, with a widening chasm between the south and the north.

Through recurrent drama, hurried improvisation, and all-too-rare leadership, the EU has overcome these crises. In the process, however, three corresponding liberal beliefs have been shattered: economic integration will lead to a political union; economic governance will ensure Europe's prosperity; and a union of democratic countries will be the best guarantee against the return of violence and conflicts to the Continent.

These liberal principles were born and implemented under the American security umbrella of the 1950s. The EU did not make peace; the American peace—both the Marshall Plan and the American security guarantee—made the EU possible. In Brussels, technocrats often get that part of history wrong. American hegemony suited many European countries, even after the end of the Cold War. The involvement of the United States allowed a primarily civilian Europe to continue apace. The US presence also gave Europe the ability to postpone difficult strategic choices and suspend international responsibilities.

But this rather limited engagement with hard security issues carried significant costs for the credibility and moral standing of the Union: its inaction in Srebrenica, Rwanda, and Darfur contributed to humanitarian disasters that tainted a record of self-claimed righteousness and integrity in foreign affairs.[2] The EU seemed to reach for an impossible ideal of absolute purity in world politics, a "divine goodness in history that it is impossible to symbolize in any other way than by complete powerlessness or rather by a consistent refusal to use power in the rivalries of history."[3]

2. James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and Hugo Slim, "Dithering over Darfur? A Preliminary Review of the International Response," *International Affairs* 80, no. 5 (October 2004): 811–28.

3. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation, Volume I: Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 72.

This attitude—a mixture of idealist moral stance and realist restraint—proved an untenable international position.

Problems are deeper than a lack of ambition and capabilities. The European Union suffers from two contradictions in its approach to power. First, the Union has neglected power politics because it has been militarily weak, but equally, it has been militarily weak because it abandoned power politics. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, EU leaders started to understand their priorities needed to change: Brussels, historically hard on its soft power and rather soft on its hard power, needed to become softer on its soft power and harder on its hard power.

Still, the soft power of expanding rules and norms was not always perceived as particularly benign by the affected countries. The normative power was in essence much more imperial than suspected, however "post-modern, lite or sane" it claimed to be.[4] Furthermore, this soft power often hid the lack of a real EU foreign policy—a definition of preferences that would enhance its interests. Last, when it came to the use of force, the Union had limited itself to a narrow set of liberal missions, from peacekeeping to state building.

Even in these endeavors, the EU regularly confused ends and means—an operation was successful because it existed. The Union also repeatedly refused to take the necessary risks—a zero-casualty caveat seemed to be attached implicitly to concepts of operations. Finally, leadership often failed to understand the strategic stakes at hand—by sticking to neutrality and impartiality, it made its humanitarian interventions largely ineffective.[5] European soldiers are often used as Red Cross personnel, sometimes as instructors, and on occasion as *gardien de la paix* (police officers), but nearly never as embodiments of coercion. To kill and to die for the European flag is still largely a political taboo.

The second contradiction is related to power distribution at the international level. Since its creation, the Union has persisted through two stages of international polarity and into a third—a relatively stable bipolar order, a unipolar world, and now an emerging multipolar system. Vis-à-vis Washington, the first configuration meant a protectorate where the cause was common, the second stage involved balancing or supporting the unilateral decisions of the United States, and the third stage implies emancipation in the face of diverging interests. This change, which emerged during US President Barack Obama's second term, is the most fundamental reason why Europe had to stop outsourcing its security and embrace a Gaullist posture.[6]

4. Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003); Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-Building in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); and David Boucher, " 'Sane' and 'Insane' Imperialism: British Idealism, New Liberalism and Liberal Imperialism," *History of European Ideas* 44, no. 8 (2018): 1189–1204.

5. Jean-Yves Haine, "The European Crisis of Liberal Internationalism," *International Journal* 64, no. 2 (June 2009): 453–79.

6. Jean-Yves Haine, "A New Gaullist Moment? European Bandwagoning and International Polarity," *International Affairs* 91, no. 5 (September 2015): 991–1008.

Yet Europeans, by and large, remain reluctant to shift toward strategic autonomy. "This general inclination to leave the strategic problems to others is probably the consequence of having lived with American leadership for so long and so well."[7] But a more cynical reason can also be seen: autonomy entails responsibilities that demand choices and risks and thus portend less solidarity. The American hegemon was also a "pacifier," a comfortable framework in which internal competitions could be subdued, relative gains did not really matter, and the imbalance among partners was harmless.[8] Without the Washington hegemon, the power of Germany—or lack thereof—becomes essential but also controversial. In sum, by 2020 the EU presented serious preexisting conditions; it was process oriented, fragmented, and inward looking.

Resilience

Health care remains a national prerogative; in their combat against the virus, states inevitably sidelined the European institutions. Throughout the crises, Brussels was neither able to coordinate national lockdown calendars, nor was it able to keep borders open and prevent single-market violations. The EU witnessed an increasingly nefarious lack of cohesion, especially when Italy, devastated by the first wave of the pandemic, asked for help and received nearly none. Resentment set in, nationalism rose, neighbors became suspicious, and borders closed. At the same time, the poor management of the pandemic by other great powers including China and the United States did, by contrast, reinforce several common European characteristics: public health service, scientific expertise, political transparency and accountability, the democratic decision-making process, and international aid and assistance.[9]

For Europeans, the negative economic impact from the pandemic is likely to be unprecedented. With a simultaneous supply and demand shock, according to the International Monetary Fund, the gross domestic product of the Eurozone will be almost 10 percent lower in 2021 than in 2019.[10] The effects within Europe are not equally distributed. European countries with economies dependent upon manufacturing and tourism are disproportionately affected by lockdown measures and travel restrictions. Moreover, these countries often have weaker fiscal reserves to compensate for unemployment and boost economic activities. This asymmetry of effects will lead to further long-term economic divergence between southern and northern Europe.

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7. Christoph Bertram, "Europe's Best Interest: Staying Close to Number One," *International Politics and Society* 6, no. 1 (January 2003): 65. Original in German.

8. Josef Joffe, "Europe's American Pacifier," *Foreign Policy* 54 (Spring 1984): 64–82, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1148355?seq=1.

9. Richard Youngs, "How the Coronavirus Tests European Democracy," Carnegie Europe, June 23, 2020, https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/23/how-coronavirus-tests-european-democracy-pub-82109.

10. *World Economic Outlook Update, June 2020*: *A Crisis Like No Other, an Uncertain Recovery* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2020), https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/06/24/WEOUpdateJune2020.

Important decisions were taken in 2020, however. First, as early as March 2020, the European Central Bank agreed to fund the 750 billion euro Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme—a quantitative easing operation of government bond purchases. Although it kept market worries about debt sustainability in check, this program encountered the wrath of the German constitutional court, which demanded a "proportionality assessment" to ensure it did not illegally finance governments or expose taxpayers to potential losses.[11]

Second, on July 21, 2020, member states agreed on a recovery fund composed of 390 billion euros in grants and 360 billion euros in loans to help countries affected by the pandemic. This aid that Brussels would borrow on the market added to the 1.074 trillion euro seven-year budget (the Multi-annual Financial Framework). The July agreement was the result of painstaking negotiations—not quite a "Hamiltonian moment" but a significant step toward a transfer EU. The scheme is not a permanent system of fully mutualized debt, but Olaf Scholz, the German finance minister and vice chancellor, was quick to use the American analogy.[12] There was a clear recognition the survival of Europe was at stake. As French President Emmanuel Macron argued, Europe "faced a moment of truth," warning without solidarity, Europe "as a 'political project' would collapse."[13] German Chancellor Angela Merkel decided to act quickly and decisively. As she has acknowledged: "Europe needs us, just as we need Europe. . . . The EU won't survive without more forceful German leadership."[14]

Third, it was also decided the European Commission would manage a collective procurement program for future vaccines to make sure all Europeans, beyond their nationalities, would be covered.

These decisions had positive effects. They decreased populist and nationalist movements throughout Europe.[15] The massive economic aid program alleviated economic divisions between northern and southern Europe and political tensions between eastern and western Europe. Brussels ceased to be the usual scapegoat for everything that goes wrong internally. Yet drawbacks emerged. The collective approach in vaccine procurement emphasized solidarity and equality, but mistakes were made and the rollout throughout Europe was delayed. A blame game

11. "Seeing Red: Germany's Highest Court Takes Issue with the European Central Bank," *Economist*, May 7, 2020, https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/05/07/germanys-highest-court-takes-issue-with-the-european-central-bank.

12. Guy Chazan, "The Minds behind Germany's Shifting Fiscal Stance: Jörg Kukies and Olaf Scholz Key in Reshaping Berlin's Hawkish Attitude towards Europe," *Financial Times*, June 9, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/2503ce9c-cde9-4301-bba0-8301f7deaf3b.

13. Victor Mallet and Roula Khalaf, "Macron Warns of EU Unravelling Unless It Embraces Financial Solidarity," *Financial Times*, April 16, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/d19dc7a6-c33b-4931-9a7e-4a74674da29a.

14. Matthew Karnitschnig, "What Merkel Wants," *Politico*, June 25, 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/what-angela-merkel-germany-wants-eu-influence.

15. Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Carisa Nietsche, "The Coronavirus Is Exposing Populists' Hollow Politics: As the Crisis Worsens, Even More Extreme Groups May Prosper," Foreign Policy, April 16, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/16/coronavirus-populism-extremism-europe-league-italy/.

inevitably arose between states, the Commission, and pharmaceutical groups. The recovery fund has market credibility because it is supported by Germany. Berlin will likely have a preponderant voice in its management, and this position may trigger unease, especially in France. A Europe without German leadership runs the risk of division; a German Europe runs the risk of resentment.

Between Brussels' missteps and German dominance, the equilibrium is thus fragile. Yet economic solidarity remains a prerequisite for cohesion at the foundation of European security. Crises necessarily change priorities, affect interests, and call past decisions into question. It is too soon to tell if this will be the case with defense budgets in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, but the scenario is likely.

The European Defense Fund, launched on January 1, 2021, was established to strengthen the defense industrial base and develop innovation. Initially it was given a 13 billion euro budgetary envelope (2021–27), but this amount was reduced to 8 billion euros in the Commission's latest proposal.[16] As for the long list of projects decided under the Permanent Structured Cooperation scheme established in December 2017, it is highly unlikely all will survive unscathed. As the new director of the European Defence Agency, Jiří Šedivý, acknowledged, "we can expect an additional strain on resources, it is already looming."[17] Yet despite the unprecedented impact from the pandemic and potential weakening of the EU security foundations, the political and economic underpinnings of the Union have the potential to remain relatively resilient.

Global Distancing

In a matter of months, the coronavirus has affected every great power, revealing obvious vulnerabilities: a chaotic American presidency, China's one-party, opaque decision making, and Russia's one-leader discretionary policies. The international community seems to be back to "competitive decadence," where great powers compete with one another in their attempts to solve mounting internal problems.[18] In this context, the international society of states has become more fragmented and less responsive; international cooperation, from humanitarian concerns to collective security issues, is more difficult. Our multipolar world is more heterogeneous and distant. The most likely configuration that will emerge is a world disorder—not necessarily more violent, but essentially power regulated rather than rules based.

16. Raluca Csernatoni, "EU Security and Defense Challenges: Toward a European Defense Winter?," Carnegie Europe, June 11, 2020, https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/06/11/eu-security-and-defense-challenges-toward-european-defense-winter-pub-82032; and European Commission, "Commission Welcomes the Political Agreement on the European Defence Fund," European Commission, December 10, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2319.

17. Robin Emmott, "On Budget Eve, EU Defence Money at Risk from Coronavirus," Reuters, May 12, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-eu-defence/on-budget-eve-eu-defence-money-at-risk-from-coronavirus-idUSKBN22O1BU.

18. Pierre Hassner, "Cold War to Hot Peace," *New York Times*, October 16, 1973.

In such a world, where will Europe stand? First, the United States has moved from friend to stranger, if not outright competitor. The pandemic has deteriorated the already poor relations between Washington and Brussels. US President Donald Trump, the first American president to be overtly hostile to the EU, framed the relationship as a zero-sum game. "Trump saw Europeans as adversaries, not America's closest allies, and often told advisers different versions of the idea that 'the EU is worse than China, only smaller.' "[19] Certainly rifts have happened before, from the Suez to Iraq. With the Biden presidency, a more constructive agenda will be possible, yet the last several years have left many Europeans with mixed feelings toward the United States, and significant differences remain.

Recent history suggests the United States is increasingly moving away from the Atlantic and the European theater to focus more on the Indo-Pacific theater. The categorical nature of transatlantic relations has been subsumed by multipolarity. A common perception of friend and foe is at the basis of a functioning alliance; with today's rapidly changing threats and situational relationships, a broad Alliance such as NATO cannot maintain consensus in every contingency. US President Joe Biden reaffirmed "the faith" in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, yet strategic foci and threat perceptions among Allies vary.[20]

Second, China has moved from stranger to rival. The pandemic has reinforced several negative characteristics including China's unreliability, lack of transparency, and disinformation efforts. In addition to the crisis, the increasing authoritarianism of China's leader President Xi Jinping, further restrictions of basic freedoms, and the poor prospect of any liberalization have pushed Europe toward a more cautious approach vis-à-vis Beijing.

The crisis has also underlined the asymmetry in EU-China economic relations, including the Union's vulnerability in some crucial sectors. Europe is not in a position to decouple, yet many European governments are actively promoting supply chain diversification for a wide range of products to other producers like Vietnam and India.[21] But few European governments, first among them Germany, are willing to engage in an economic battle with Beijing. Under German leadership and amid strong criticism from human rights groups and unambiguous opposition from Washington, the EU signed the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China in December 2020. Merkel believed it was "right

19. Susan B. Glasser, "John Bolton's Epic Score-Settling," *New Yorker*, June 18, 2020.

20. David E. Sanger, "Biden Declares 'America Is Back' on International Stage," *New York Times*, February 23, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/02/19/world/g7-meeting-munich-security-conference.

21. Archana Chaudhary, "EU to Focus on Diversifying Crucial Supply Chains, Says Borrell," Bloomberg, July 14, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-14/eu-to-focus-on-diversifying-crucial-supply-chains-says-borrell.

and important to strive for good strategic relations with China."[22] By strategic, she essentially meant a growing trade relationship.

Moreover, with worldwide deflation, Chinese economic growth will suffer. The temptation, already clear, is for the Chinese Communist Party to compensate domestic weakness with a more assertive affirmation of Chinese power. Thus far, the EU seems divided on how to react. After a new security law was imposed on Hong Kong, Europeans condemned the move but were unable to agree on any punitive measures.[23]

Under domestic pressure and growing evidence of massive human rights violations against the Uighurs in the Xinjiang region, the EU decided in March 2021, for the first time since 1989, to impose targeted sanctions on four Chinese officials involved in operating internment camps in Xinjiang. In the EU 2019 Strategic Outlook, China was defined "as a negotiating partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival."[24] With an increasingly assertive China and after the departure of Merkel this year, partnership might become more challenging. Economic competition and political rivalry will thus continue, albeit in a more distanced form.

Third, Russia remains an enemy but a weaker one. Russia has been affected by two major crises simultaneously—the pandemic and the collapse of oil prices. Russian President Vladimir Putin gambled with Saudi Arabia and lost. Both crises will have a significant impact on Russian state resources. In 2019, income from oil and gas accounted for nearly 40 percent of Russia's federal budget revenues. The Central Bank of Russia estimated a 6 percent fall in gross domestic product in 2020, and fiscal measures to support people and businesses affected by the pandemic add up to just 40 billion US dollars or 2.8 percent of gross domestic product. By comparison, Germany had a 130 billion euro rescue package for its economy.[25]

Yet Putin is unlikely to moderate his foreign policy approach—any analogy with the mid-1980s is misguided.[26] With economic difficulties, the country can be expected to take a nationalist and conservative turn that will include increased repression against domestic political opponents and scapegoating of foreign intruders. Russia's main lesson from the pandemic may well be confirmation of the superiority of self-reliance in a globalized world. Moscow will continue to interfere in US and European politics—it is cheap and carries few risks—and

22. Hans von der Burchard, "Merkel Pushes EU-China Investment Deal over the Finish Line Despite Criticism," *Politico*, December 29 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-china-investment-deal-angela-merkel-pushes-finish-line-despite-criticism/.

23. Ian Bond, "The EU Must Be Prepared to Be Critical of China. It Can Start with Hong Kong's Security Law," Euronews, June 24, 2020.

24. European Commission, *EU-China: A Strategic Outlook*, March 12, 2019.

25. See Henry Foy, "Russia: Pandemic Tests Putin's Grip on Power," *Financial Times*, May 4, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/d4d61de4-8aea-11ea-9dcb-fe6871f4145a.

26. Eugene Rumer, "The Coronavirus Won't Make Putin Play Nice," *Quick Take* (blog), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 14, 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/14/coronavirus-won-t-make-putin-play-nice-pub-81555.

the value gap with Brussels will increase. The current sanctions regime is likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future and with it the absence of meaningful dialogue. The 2021 imprisonment of Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny and the mass arrest of protesters have only increased moral revulsion among many Europeans. The prospect of a reset button appears as remote as ever.[27]

Global distancing within the international system leaves the EU in an unprecedented position—mostly alone. Sidelined by its traditional US ally, contending with an assertive China, and confronting a hostile Russia, the Union's responsibility is a strategic reality. The EU must learn the language of power politics and the new vocabulary that comes with it—force and coercion, balance of power, and zone of influence. In a loose, multipolar system, every major power has to think for itself.

Understandably, the United States is shifting its focus toward the Indo-Pacific region and is worrying about the rise of China. The EU has to confront instability in its eastern and southern neighborhoods, and overall interests common to Europe and the United States are decreasing in number. In short, Europe remains a middle power *in size*. With a population larger than the United States and with the second largest nominal gross domestic product, and despite the considerable defense capabilities of some of its members (one a nuclear power), it is still unable to compete militarily as a world power. Moreover, the EU has become a middle power *in position*: the EU finds itself increasingly torn between Beijing and Washington. From a sociological and historical point of view, the Union's situation has evolved—it is further apart from Washington. This shift does not imply a rapprochement with Beijing, yet the EU's autonomy and concomitant responsibility has increased.

A Grand Strategy

Any grand strategy is fraught with difficulties. Complexity makes prediction impossible, contingencies make it useless. For Europeans, there is the added dimension of bringing together a group of countries with vastly different power dynamics, strategic cultures, and security traditions. Some countries may be tempted to consider that any grand strategy exercise is doomed to fail because Europeans do not share a sense of community that would allow for such an instrument to be relevant and meaningful. Yet at its core, a grand strategy translates an understanding of what we are and where we act and reveals intentions regarding what we have and what we want. Around this core, unity, policy, and proportionality form the necessary basis of an EU grand strategy.

Unity

Unity is the first prerequisite. A grand strategy is a declaration of intentions, and in the case of the EU, the initial audience is domestic. The

27. Carl Bildt, "Why the West's Attempts to Reset Relations with Russia Have Failed Again and Again," *Washington Post*, February 18, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/18/carl-bildt-russia-reset-putin/.

first attempt at a grand strategy occurred after the 2003 Iraq crisis, and the assumption was a Europe divided was powerless.[28] In 2009, Europe was too fragmented to contemplate an update. In 2016, after the terrorist attacks, the immigration crises, and the Brexit vote that took place a week before its publication, a new document emphasized resilience in capacities and in politics, underlining the need for a concerted EU role.[29] For Europeans today, however, unity is more difficult than ever.

First, as mentioned before, the US umbrella ceased to protect the EU against its own discord. Second, at 28 members, the club is too large to make timely and effective decisions and actions in foreign and security policy. Attempts to build a limited core group or vote with a qualified majority have been a fiasco; consensus building seems the only way to move forward.[30] Third, and most importantly, Europe has to position itself around issues and in areas that are largely unfamiliar. Too often the result has been Europe's absence or its refuge behind empty formulas or paycheck diplomacy.

But unity cannot be only a matter of a top-to-down process run by a foreign policy elite. Unity must include a European forum where issues can be debated and decisions accounted for. Too often, foreign policy is decided behind closed doors in a world of classified documents and internal memos. The EU needs to hold hearings and establish parliamentary oversight, including at the national level—a necessary step toward legitimacy. Transparency is not only a democratic imperative, it is a strategic necessity, adding a crucial but missing dimension to the Union's arsenal—public opinion, a formidable force multiplier. After the pandemic, temptations of inward-looking, protectionist, and isolationist measures will increase. Keeping the EU's ambition intact begins with promoting the saliency of international politics in all-too-often parochial European debates.

Policy

The second component of a grand strategy is policy—a daunting task for the EU. At the most fundamental level, the institution has to replace process with policy. For too long, the enlargement framework was the only lens through which the Union perceived its neighborhood—membership for those who would join, association for those who could not. The enlargement framework was perceived as benign, but as the fiasco in Ukraine demonstrated, it was not. Moscow saw the expansion of rules as the essence of an imperial policy and decided to draw the line.

28. Alyson J. K. Bailes, *The European Security Strategy: An Evolutionary History*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Policy Paper No. 10 (Stockholm: SIPRI, February 2005).

29. Nathalie Tocci, "From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy: Explaining the Journey," *International Politics* 54, no. 4 (July 2017): 487–502; and Wolfgang Wagner and Rosanne Anholt, "Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic or Promising?," *Contemporary Security Policy* 37, no. 3 (2016): 414–30.

30. Leonard Schuette, "Should the EU Make Foreign Policy Decisions by Majority Voting?," Centre for European Reform, May 2019.

For the EU, expansion was not geopolitical but technocratic. Of course, that Europe was mistaken does not justify the Russian reaction.[31]

The first lesson is about framing issues and thinking strategically. A key merit of the 2003 document was its attempt to define threats, even in very generic terms. What is needed, however, is a more demanding and challenging definition of interests and identification of friends and enemies. Europeans may be averse to thinking this way, but it is a prerequisite for genuine strategic behavior. As Raymond Aron, following Carl Schmitt, described it, the identification of friends and foes is "the first task of political responsibility that cannot be avoided, it is the supreme political act."[32]

Designing strategies to face hostile acts, either by deterrence, coercion, or negotiation, is the second step. In the rare instance when the EU has identified an enemy, it has done so from a normative point of view and put its identity as a liberal entity before its strategic interest, thus making dialogue impossible. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is a war criminal, yet he is also a critical participant in peace talks. Putin may indeed be a brutal autocratic leader, but Russian cooperation is needed to tame Iranian nuclear ambitions. In a multipolar world where gray zones will replace clear lines of identification, the task may be difficult but must not be avoided. Postponing this debate constitutes abandoning strategic purposes.

The third step involves the EU prioritizing itself. On several important issues—trade, climate change, and nuclear proliferation—American and European interests do not align. On security issues, Europeans have rarely acted for themselves. In Ukraine, the Minsk II peace process, albeit fragile, is a European solution to a European problem where the absence of the United States was a condition for progress. With Iran, Europeans are working to salvage an agreement they deemed in their interests while Washington is still hesitant on lifting sanctions and opening talks.[33]

Overall, the EU maintains a strange but not surprisingly myopic view of world affairs, based on an excessive focus on the hegemon—the United States—despite an expected incongruence between US global interests and Europe's regional security. In European capitals, there is a tendency to hide behind the storm and hope for quieter times. The past cannot be the prologue; in the increasing antagonism between China and America, the EU will have to choose sides according to its interests.

31. See John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014): 77–89; and Stefan Auer, "Carl Schmitt in the Kremlin: the Ukraine Crisis and the Return of Geopolitics," *International Affairs* 91, no. 5 (September 2015): 953–68.

32. Raymond Aron, *Penser la Guerre, Clausewitz, 2: L'Age Planétaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 119.

33. Colum Lynch, "Europeans Fear Iran Nuclear Window Closing," *Foreign Policy*, March 26, 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/26/europe-us-biden-iran-nuclear-deal-lift-sanctions/.

Europe so far has displayed no intention to unite with Washington against Beijing.[34]

Proportionality

Considerations of proportionality—the delicate balance between ends and means—follow considerations of unity and policy. Not surprisingly, for the last 20 years the EU has focused on the latter rather than the former, and since the process has been capability driven and not strategy led, inadequacies, disconnect, and mismatch have abounded. The founding act of the Common Security and Defence Policy in 1999 was an agreement to rearm Europe for autonomous action, which at the time was translated as a military objective of 60,000 troops. This target was rapidly abandoned in favor of small, deployable battle groups of around 2,500 troops.[35]

Military budgets were drastically decreased after the 2009 financial crisis, and the pandemic crisis may again further reduce overall defense funding. This lack of funding narrowed potential military operations to a limited band of the security spectrum—low-intensity peacekeeping missions. Needless to say, planning for potential military operations should be approached in the opposite manner. What is the EU ready to do and where?

As stated in the 2016 document, the EU views security as global; it has interests, stakes, and options everywhere. This perspective is the result of normative thinking—universal values—and security traditions—France is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The strategic reality, however, is different: the scope of Europe's ambition should be regional. In a multipolar world, regional responsibilities are essential. Ignoring these responsibilities invites foreign interventions and contests.

The EU has refused to act in Syria, but Moscow did. In Libya, the EU disagreed and Turkey has moved in. France decided to intervene in Mali, then in the entire Sahel at great cost. Several other European air forces are operating in Iraq and Syria against Daesh. Does Mali belong to a European perimeter? If so, why not Libya? Or Tunisia? What about Turkey? Is Georgia part of the European zone of influence? Without proper focus and care, the Balkans will certainly be subject to increasing Russian or Chinese pressure. What are the risks and responsibilities of the exclusion or inclusion of Tbilisi? What kind of middle ground is achievable and with whom? These conversations need to be initiated at the EU level before national decisions are made. The strategic imperative in a loose multipolar system is to protect a zone of interests, defining lines, even redlines. Europe is an idea; it also needs to become a geographic, and thus strategic, entity.

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34. Philippe Le Corre, "Europe's Tightrope Diplomacy on China," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 24, 2021, https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/24/europe-s-tightrope-diplomacy-on-china-pub-84159.

35. See Sven Biscop, "Battalions to Brigades: The Future of European Defence," *Survival* 62, no. 5 (2020): 105–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1819654.

Once the scope of interests has been defined—flexibility is wiser than dogmatism—then the level of capabilities can be determined. For the EU, two fundamentally different contingencies must be addressed: protection and projection. The first contingency requires high-tech and heavy weaponry, sophisticated air defenses, and substantial and combined joint forces. The second contingency requires light and deployable units, strategic airlift, and a lead nation. Europe today is unprepared for either one. The first contingency is left to NATO, namely the US military; the second contingency is shouldered mainly by France and the United Kingdom.

The EU's current lack of readiness is as alarming as its lack of a meaningful strategic culture. While significant investments were decided before the pandemic, it remains to be seen whether they will be maintained. Modernization is one step, lethality is another step. Kinetic weapons, with trained personnel and maintenance and training budgets, must be the principal investment. Primarily, the EU needs to understand the strategic landscape and change its mindset from a liberal community intent upon forgetting past wars to a strategic actor prepared to deter or wage future conflicts.

A call for arms is not a call for war. Proportionality is about creating and using the means appropriate to the chosen end. Precisely because Europe is weak, restraint and moderation must be its guide. The EU must take responsibility for its backyard—the Balkans and the Mediterranean shore—and create its own environment rather than react to an environment not of its choosing. In his second inaugural address, US President Woodrow Wilson announced Americans were "provincials no longer."[36] Europe, out of retirement as the result of the rise of a multipolar world and the end of US hegemony, needs to be precisely that: provincial.

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36. John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (London: Penguin Random House, 2018), 270.