


# EUROPE: A TIME FOR STRATEGY

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# EUROPE: A TIME FOR STRATEGY

SVEN BISCOP, JOLYON HOWORTH & BASTIAN GIEGERICH



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President: Viscount Etienne DAVIGNON  
Director-General: Raf VAN HELLEMONT  
Series Editor: Prof. Dr. Sven BISCOP

\* \* \*

**Egmont - The Royal Institute for International Relations**

Address Naamsestraat / Rue de Namur 69, 1000 Brussels, Belgium  
Phone 00-32-(0)2.223.41.14  
Fax 00-32-(0)2.223.41.16  
E-mail info@egmontinstitute.be  
Website: www.egmontinstitute.be

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Eekhout 2

9000 Gent

Tel. 09/233 80 88

Info@academiapress.be

Fax 09/233 14 09

www.academiapress.be

J. Story-Scientia NV Wetenschappelijke Boekhandel

Sint-Kwintensberg 87

B-9000 Gent

Tel. 09/225 57 57

Info@story.be

Fax 09/233 14 09

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# Introduction

The idea to review the 2003 *European Security Strategy* (ESS), put forward notably by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, did not meet with universal enthusiasm. While not everybody was convinced that the ESS was already in need of updating, some also feared that too divisive debates would be provoked, particularly on Russia, and that the EU would end up with a worse rather than a better document. Hence the somewhat cautiously expressed – and grammatically slightly awkward – mandate given to High Representative Javier Solana by the December 2007 European Council: “to examine the implementation of the Strategy with a view to proposing elements on how to improve the implementation and, as appropriate, elements to complement it”.

Just like in 2003, when the draft of the original ESS was discussed, the EU Institute for Security Studies organized a series of seminars, in Rome, Natolin, Helsinki and Paris, in June-October 2008, to debate the implementation of the ESS with academics and policy-makers. All three of us were involved in one or more of these seminars, and in Helsinki we constituted one of the panels, chaired by Daniel Keohane of the EUISS. Our thanks go to the EUISS for inviting us to participate in this exciting exercise.

The debate was concluded by the adoption of a *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World* by the December 2008 European Council,<sup>1</sup> which decided to leave the text of the ESS itself untouched. The *Report* “does not replace the ESS, but reinforces it” and the ESS remains in force.

The question now is: will actionable conclusions be drawn from the *Report* in order to effectively improve implementation of the ESS? For even if one agrees with the decision not to revise the ESS itself, problems of implementation there undoubtedly are. If the process ends here, most observers will rightfully be disappointed. This *Egmont Paper* summarizes what we see as urgent priorities for the EU to address in order to fulfil its inevitable ambition of being a global strategic actor.

Sven BISCOP, Egmont & College of Europe  
Jolyon HOWORTH, Yale University  
Bastian GIEGERICH, International Institute for Strategic Studies

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1. See [http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/documents/en/081211\\_EU%20Security%20Strategy.pdf](http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/documents/en/081211_EU%20Security%20Strategy.pdf).





# The European Security Strategy: Now Do It

SVEN BISCOP

Among officials from outside the EU and among academics, in the course of 2008 the “review” of the *European Security Strategy* (ESS), as it was often called – although that was never the mandate given to Javier Solana by the December 2007 European Council – generated great expectations. That in itself is proof of the importance attached to the ESS.

That the European Council in December 2008, after a long debate – which not coincidentally only really gained steam after the summer’s crisis in Georgia – decided to leave the ESS untouched should in itself not be a reason for disappointment. If the EU today is not the global power that it could have been, it is not because its strategy is not valid, but because it has been half-hearted in implementing it. All of the so-called new threats and challenges are already mentioned in the ESS. It could indeed say more about Russia, climate change or energy, but adding a few words here and there is not what matters most – implementation does. If anything, the Georgian crisis confirms the EU strategy of engaging global actors like Russia by pulling them into the multilateral system, just like the financial crisis confirms the need – as if we did not know already – for effective multilateral rules and institutions in the economic sphere.

This is not a call for complacency though. It is not sufficient to *have* a strategy – one must then also *do* strategy.

## A Report on Implementation

Rather than amending the ESS, which offers both a sound concept and an ambitious agenda,<sup>2</sup> the December 2008 European Council adopted a *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World*. Judging by the EU’s performance, according to the *Report*, “despite all that has been achieved, implementation of the ESS remains work in progress. For our full potential to be realised we need to be still more capable, more coherent and more active”. The *Report* did not meet expectations for a true strategic review however.

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2. Sven Biscop & Jan Joel Andersson (eds.), *The EU and the European Security Strategy – Forging a Global Europe*. Abingdon, Routledge, 2008, p. 4.

On the positive side, Solana did not allow the debate to be hijacked by the events of August – strategy should not be about the last thing that happened to occur, but about fundamental interests and principles and long-term objectives. The *Report* provides a concise overview of implementation and confirms the holistic and multilateral approach. Interestingly, it mentions human security: “We have worked to build human security, by reducing poverty and inequality, promoting good governance and human rights, assisting development, and addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity”. Absent from, though implicitly present in the ESS, human security can be a useful organizing concept, binding everything together and explaining the core aim of the EU’s holistic approach as a global actor: making sure that every individual, everywhere, has access to physical security, economic prosperity, political freedom and social wellbeing. To realize this for its own citizens is the fundamental interest of the EU; to realize it for citizens worldwide is the means to safeguard that interest and, at the same time, a positive agenda in its own right.

The *Report* ends with a firm call to action: “To build a secure Europe in a better world, we must do more to shape events. And we must do it now”. But it offers little in terms of concrete recommendations. Nor did the European Council provide a follow-up mechanism to ensure that implementation of the ESS would be stepped up and the linkages between the ESS and decision-making enhanced. That would require more political courage, more as well as better capabilities, and, in a number of areas, the definition of clearer “sub-strategies”<sup>3</sup> to the ESS. As it is, the strategic objectives have – rightly – been reaffirmed in the *Report*, but a number of fundamental questions remain as to how to achieve them.

## Strategic Choices for the Implementation of the ESS

### *Global Crisis Management*

EU Member States are certainly not averse to deploying their forces, but the large majority is on the Balkans, where they logically assume responsibility, and in Afghanistan and (for a long time) Iraq, interventions – one rapidly becoming as controversial as the other – directly motivated by self-defence. The 7-8,000 European blue helmets in UNIFIL in Lebanon (since 2006) are a positive exception, but they contrast sharply with the 1,000 troops reluctantly deployed in the Congo in 2006 and the apparent unwillingness to launch a new bridging oper-

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3. Sub-strategy does not refer to a specific or new category of documents, but to documents that elaborate on one aspect of the ESS and thus de facto function as sub-strategies to it, e.g. the ENP, the strategies on WMD, on terrorism, on Africa etc.

ation in the east of the DRC in late 2008 (after Operation Artemis in 2003) in order to avert a humanitarian catastrophe. Understandably perhaps – but not necessarily justifiably – there is no will for an intervention in Darfur; in January 2008, after a very long force generation the EU “only” launched a bridging operation to protect refugees in neighbouring Chad, until March 2009. Participation in UN operations other than UNIFIL (e.g. MONUC in the DRC) remains minimal: in late 2008 the EU27, Lebanon set aside, accounted for less than 2,700 out of nearly 90,000 “blue helmets” or just under 3%.

Most Member States do put their forces in harm’s way, for national, NATO or coalitions-of-the-willing operations. Yet although legally the EU’s Petersberg Tasks include operations at the high end of the spectrum of violence, politically the Member States are still extremely divided over the use of force under the EU flag. It is striking that in a *Declaration on Strengthening Capabilities*, also adopted by the December 2008 European Council, when setting out what the EU should actually be capable of in the short term – “in the years ahead” – alone of all “illustrative scenarios” elaborated by the EUMS, “separation of parties by force” is not mentioned – the only scenario for larger-scale operations of longer duration at the high end of the spectrum. Battlegroup-size rapid response operations of limited duration is the only high-intensity target listed. Even though the EU has proven that it can mount high-risk operations if the political will is present, most ESDP operations tend to be of lower intensity and smaller scale. The still young ESDP needs to legitimize itself, hence the tendency to select operations with a large chance of success. To some extent therefore the criticism is justified that the EU takes on important but mostly “less difficult” operations, in the post-conflict phase, in reaction to the settlement of a conflict – a criticism which can of course be applied to the international community as a whole. Nevertheless one must question whether Member States are willing to fully accept the implications of the strong EU diplomatic support for the “responsibility to protect” (R2P),<sup>4</sup> which if it comes to military intervention per definition implies high-intensity operations; not mentioned in the ESS, R2P is included in the *Report* though – a positive signal.

There are positive examples of EU engagement: UNIFIL, as already mentioned; the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, deployed at record speed on 1 October 2008 after President Sarkozy successfully brokered the Six-Point Agreement between Moscow and Tbilisi; EULEX Kosovo, deployed in December 2008 in

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4. Endorsed at the UN Millennium+5 Summit in September 2005, R2P implies that if a State is unable or unwilling to protect its own population, or is itself the perpetrator of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes or crimes against humanity, national sovereignty must give way to a responsibility to protect on the part of the international community. In such cases, the Security Council must mandate intervention, if necessary by military means.

spite of Member States' divisions about the recognition of Kosovo independence; and EU NAVFOR Somalia, deployed in the same month in order to safeguard trade routes against the threat of piracy off the Somali coast. In spite of the global ambitions expressed in the ESS, Member States are reluctant though to commit to long-term, large-scale operations outside their immediate periphery or where no direct strategic interests are at stake – where “the risks are too high and the stakes are too low”. There is more willingness to implement rapid reaction operations of smaller scale and limited duration, or lower-intensity operations, but for high-intensity operations Member States still habitually look to other frameworks than the EU, even though it is obvious that these other frameworks are not always willing or available to act.

Interestingly though, even when EU Member States deploy forces for non-EU operations, the EU increasingly sells this as an EU contribution. This was clearly the case for UNIFIL, which politically was decided upon in the Council, a fact which was acknowledged by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who explicitly welcomed the *EU* contribution. The *Report* also mentions Afghanistan, where “EU Member States make a major contribution to the NATO mission”. This reflects the trend that the political centre of gravity is shifting. It has notably shifted away from NATO, to what are in effect the Alliance's two main pillars, the US and the EU: the “complete” foreign policy actors, covering everything from aid and trade to diplomacy and the military. The EU has increasingly become the political centre and the primary decision-making level for European States: *if* they want to concert, it is in the EU that they decide whether or not to act in a given situation. If their decision entails military action, the secondary step is to select the organization through which to act – NATO, ESDP, the UN, the OSCE, an ad hoc coalition – which will always be an ad hoc decision, if function of which partners want to go along and which organization is best suited for the case at hand. That in the resolution of the Georgian crisis NATO is all but a sideshow is further evidence of this trend.

### *The Elaboration of a Military Strategy?*

If the EU's engagement for global peace and security can be stepped up, there are, sadly, too many conflicts and crises for the EU to deal effectively with all of them, certainly in a leading role. Therefore, as the *Report* states, “We need to prioritise our commitments, in line with resources”. The ESS is not very clear on priorities for ESDP operations though, resulting in a missing link between the overall political objective in the ESS – “to share in the responsibility for global security” – and ESDP operations and capability development. Quantitatively, ESDP is based on the 1999 Helsinki Headline Goal, i.e. 60,000 troops. Not only

has this objective been overshadowed by the much more limited battlegroup project – although renewed emphasis is put on it in the above-mentioned *Declaration on Strengthening Capabilities* – but the actual availability of the forces declared cannot be assessed, as they are not pre-identified and Member States have mostly declared similar numbers to NATO as well. If all ongoing ESDP, NATO, UN and national operations in which EU Member States participate are counted, Europe today deploys more than 80,000 troops, but EU Member States obviously cannot mobilize 60,000 additional troops. It is equally obvious however that even the combined ESDP and NATO level of ambition still falls far short of the total combined armed forces of the EU-27: 2 million troops, on which there is no grand vision, even if collective defence is taken into account.

What is required is a unified vision on the level of ambition, cutting across organizational divides – whether operations are conducted through ESDP, NATO, the UN or an ad hoc coalition, is secondary. The EU as the political expression of Europe must decide on a military or civil-military strategy for ESDP, a ‘white book’ that would function as a sub-strategy to the ESS: how many forces should the EU-27 be able to muster for crisis management and long-term peacekeeping, for which priorities, which reserves does that require, and which capacity must be maintained for territorial defence. In all probability the result will be that Europe does not need 2 million uniforms...

Elaborating such an ESDP strategy will require a thorough debate, but some outlines can already be discerned. The EU is obviously very committed to the region which it dubs its “Neighbourhood”, in which it seeks to promote political, economic and social reform – it should also be a priority for ESDP if peace and security in the region are threatened, as in Lebanon and Georgia. Sub-Saharan Africa has been an important area of focus for ESDP until now, and should probably remain so, for few other outside actors appear willing to contribute to crisis-management on the African continent. Securing Europe’s lines of interaction with the world, of which the operation off Somalia is an example, is another priority. Importantly, the collective security system of the UN, and therefore the EU itself, as its main supporter and with two permanent members of the Security Council in its ranks, can only be legitimate if it addresses the threats to everyone’s security – too much selectivity undermines the system. Even though it cannot always play a leading role, the EU must therefore also shoulder its share of the responsibility for global peace and security by playing an active role in the Security Council and by contributing capabilities to UN crisis management and peacekeeping operations. Notably if anywhere in the world the threshold to activate the R2P-mechanism is reached, the EU, in view of its support for the principle, should muster the courage to contribute to its implementation. Once defined, these priorities should guide a proactive engagement.

All of these commitments require deployable military capabilities which the EU is currently lacking. A substantial increase in deployments is only possible in the medium to long term, in function of the ongoing transformation of European armed forces. Member States should abandon the national focus: rather than at the level of each individual Member State, the EU27 together must be capable. A resolute choice for pooling, by reducing intra-European duplications, can produce much more deployable capabilities within the current combined defence budget, notably in the framework of “permanent structured cooperation” as provided for in the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>5</sup>

### *Permanent Prevention and Conditionality*

The EU is very active in prevention and stabilization, via “positive conditionality”, notably through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). By linking them to market access and economic and financial support, the EU aims to stimulate economic, political and social reforms as well as security cooperation, so as to address the root causes and durably change the environment that leads to extremism, crisis and conflict. Yet, if “positive conditionality” as a theory seems sounds enough, practice is often lagging behind, certainly in countries that do not – immediately – qualify for EU membership. The proverbial carrots that would potentially be most effective in stimulating reform, such as opening up the European agricultural market or setting up a system for legal economic migration, are those that the EU is not willing to consider – in spite of imperative arguments suggesting that Europe would actually benefit from such measures. At the same time, conditionality is seldom applied very strictly. The impression created is that the EU favours stability and economic – and energy – interests over reform, to the detriment of Europe’s soft or normative power. Surprisingly perhaps, in the Mediterranean e.g. public opinion mostly views the EU as a status quo actor, working with the current regimes rather than promoting fundamental change.

This lack of EU soft power should not be underestimated. Rather than as the benign actor which the EU considers itself, in many southern countries it is seen as an aggressive economic actor. For many countries, the negative economic consequences of dumping and protectionism – which often cancel out the positive effects of development aid – are far more threatening than the challenges of terrorism and proliferation that dominate the western agenda. In the current difficult international climate, the EU model is urgently in need of enhancing its

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5. Sven Biscop, “Permanent Structured Cooperation and the Future of the ESDP: Transformation and Integration”. In: *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 13, 2008, No. 4, pp. 431-448, <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/papers/08/sec-gov/080918-Biscop-Helsinki-paper.pdf>.

legitimacy. The EU must therefore muster the courage to effectively apply conditionality. Admittedly, “positive conditionality” requires an extremely difficult balancing act, especially vis-à-vis countries with authoritarian regimes and vis-à-vis great powers like Russia and China: maintaining partnership and being sufficiently critical at the same time. But in that difficult context, the EU could notably show more resolve in reacting to human rights abuses, which should visibly impact on the relationship with any regime. A much enhanced image will follow, which is a prerequisite for the gradual pursuit of further-reaching political, economic and social reforms.

But has the EU really solved the dilemma of stability versus democracy? A debate seems in order on the desired end-state of especially the ENP. The *Report* mentions that the Mediterranean e.g. has still seen “insufficient political reform” and that instability is rampant, but does not indicate the way ahead. Is the aim incremental progress while maintaining the existing regimes, or full democratization – and if the latter, are EU instruments sufficient or is there an upper limit to what can be achieved via consensual tools such as the ENP? These are questions which the new Union for the Mediterranean, although the further institutionalization of the Barcelona Process which it entails is positive, does not provide an answer to, and which the projected Eastern Partnership will have to address as well.

### *Implementing the Holistic Approach*

The ESS advocates a holistic approach, but have its objectives really been incorporated by all parts of the EU machinery? Is there sufficient coordination between the different strands of foreign policy, across and within pillars, or is “stove-piping” still the order of the day? The in fact very progressive agenda of the ESS risks losing credibility if the EU does not draw the full conclusions from it, notably for its external trade, agriculture and migration policies. If an exclusive focus on hard security undermines effectiveness and legitimacy, so does e.g. a one-dimensional focus on trade. The holistic approach cannot be efficiently implemented without changes in the EU machinery. The personal union of the High Representative and the Commissioner for External Relations, and the European External Action Service provided in the Lisbon Treaty would allow for the integration of the security, political, social and economic dimensions in all foreign policies, from the creation to the implementation and evaluation of policy. A High Representative with a stronger mandate would also strengthen the EU’s capacity for preventive diplomacy and increase leadership in EU foreign policy.

## *Truly Strategic Partnerships*

Implementing the holistic approach also requires the active cooperation of all global powers. The UN collective security system can only work if all permanent members actively subscribe to it and refrain from paralyzing or bypassing the Security Council. Conditionality can only work if it is not undermined by actors that disregard human rights and other considerations. Another debate therefore is how the EU can persuade strategic partners like Russia and China, but also India, Brazil, Mexico, and the US, that “effective multilateralism” is in their long-term interest. Specific but concrete joint interests can perhaps function as building-blocks to give real substance to the politico-military dimension of these strategic partnerships. E.g. in the negotiations with Iran, Russia and China have been difficult, but not impossible partners either, given that sanctions have been adopted by the Security Council. At the same time, the growing importance of these bilateral strategic partnerships must be reconciled with the other EU objective of promoting regional integration in other parts of the world.

## *A United Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship*

One thing is clear: the EU can only have an impact if it acts as one. The EU should abandon its usual stance of “divide and rule”, i.e. Europe divides itself, and Russia or China or others rule. Europe must resolutely choose to act as one united pole in a multi-polar world, including on matters of foreign policy, security and defence. Only such a Europe will be relevant to the US and the world. Such a united EU can build a direct, comprehensive, deepened, and *equal* partnership with the US, on all matters of foreign policy, of which NATO is the technical platform that Washington and Brussels use if they want to act together militarily. Such a Europe must be much more self-conscious. That means neither having a position in favour of something simply because e.g. Russia is against and vice versa, nor being afraid of Russia, but making policy in function of Europe’s own interests and priorities. That also means therefore not just reacting to US policy and either join Washington or watch it – the last couple of years have seen too many US strategies that have proved directly counter to EU interests, on Iraq, Afghanistan and the broader Middle Eastern region, on missile defence, on the Eastern Neighbourhood. On all of these, the EU must continually define its own priorities and proactively engage US President Barack Obama.

As Paul-Henri Spaak once said, there are only two types of States in Europe: small States, and small States that have not yet realized that they are small – unfortunately the latter category are quite persistent.



## Institutionalizing the Strategic Debate

The 2008 debate has been useful at least in the sense that it forced all actors involved to think once again about the strategic-level issues, for which the pressure of current events does not always allow. In 2003, the EU discovered how to make a strategy in the first place; in 2008, the EU started to discover how to wage a strategic debate and review. Perhaps the strategic debate and the evaluation of EU policy could be more institutionalized.

Because it encompasses the whole of foreign policy, the ESS could provide the framework for a regular comprehensive assessment, across the pillars, e.g. every 5 years. In every field of foreign policy, the policy documents could be listed as well as the actions undertaken to implement them, including an assessment of their effectiveness. Such a systematic review process would provide additional focus for the various EU entities that are involved in policy planning, while it could stimulate strategic debate in political bodies such as the Political and Security Committee. Prepared by the relevant actors in the Council and Commission administration, such a high-level political debate could take place under the aegis of the “High Representative-plus” and the External Action Service, which would ensure a focus on the interests of the EU as such and on the holistic approach. But the debate should also involve the European Parliament, and could include seminars engaging academia, think tanks and the media as well as national and EU policy-makers. This would constitute a true strategic review, i.e. a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of actual policies in all areas covered by the ESS, from aid and trade, democracy and human rights promotion, to diplomacy and the military. This would also allow the EU to identify in which areas the ESS has not yet been translated into “sub-strategies”, policies and actions, as well as in which cases its policies in one area are contradictory to those in another.

## Conclusion

2009 will be an important year for makers of strategy. President Obama will undoubtedly task the elaboration of a new *National Security Strategy*. At the NATO Summit in April, it is generally expected that the drafting of a new *Strategic Concept* will be tasked. If it wants its interests and priorities to be taken into account, the EU must make sure to have its voice heard. The *Report* on the implementation of the ESS is important in this regard – but it should be the start rather than the end of a process. On the basis of the work done, the next European Council should identify the priority areas in which action plans have to be

drawn up to improve implementation, or “sub-strategies” elaborated to steer policy, with follow-up assured at the next meeting of the Heads of State and Government. A continually proactive stance must follow.

“Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free”, reads the opening sentence of the ESS. Viewed in the light of Europe’s history, that statement still holds true today. Five years on, the opening sentence of the *Report* states that “the European Union carries greater responsibilities than at any time in its history”. That statement too is true.

# The Case for an EU Grand Strategy

JOLYON HOWORTH

*The European Union needs to be in a position to play its full role on the international stage* (Saint-Malo Declaration 4 December 1998).

## The Stakes

Sixty years after the founding of NATO, twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, ten years after Saint-Malo, and five years after the publication of the *European Security Strategy* (ESS), it is high time for the EU to focus properly on the implications of that key phrase from the Saint-Malo declaration. What *is* the “international stage”? What would a “full role” *entail* for the EU? And what would be *required* for it to “be in a position” to do so? To date, despite significant progress in the development and implementation of ESDP, and despite a full year’s “debate” (throughout 2008) over the implementation of the ESS, the EU has still not really begun to address these key questions. The 2003 document focused on *responding* to security challenges posed by “new” threats such as terrorism, WMD, regional conflicts and organized crime. It saw the EU *respond* overwhelmingly in terms of crisis management, international institutions, multilateralism, improved governance and development aid. It did not attempt to analyze the emerging centres of strategic power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, or to probe the shifting dynamics of an embryonic multi-polar system. It made no effort to apprehend the shifts in strategic ambition which were already becoming apparent among a new range of global players (China, India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa), instead comforting itself with the reassuring notion of multiple partnerships. It failed to ask questions about the essential collective interests of the EU’s Member States, particularly in terms of their ongoing access to the vital arteries of global trade: sea-lanes, strategic choke-points, energy pipelines. Although the ESS did note that the EU had become a global player, its gaze rarely rose above its near neighbourhood and hinterland. Above all, in asserting its need for military power, the Union cautiously framed this in terms of regional crisis management and humanitarian intervention rather than in terms of strategic need or direction. The development of crisis management instruments is essential and urgent. But it does not constitute a strategy.

The December 2008 *Report on the Implementation of the ESS* recognizes that, over the preceding five years, the threats facing the EU have become “increas-

ingly complex”, that “we must be ready to shape events” by “becoming more strategic in our thinking”, and that this will involve being “more effective and visible around the world”. Yet, disappointingly, the report makes no effort to outline what these laudable ambitions might require or how they could be achieved.

This cannot continue. The EU did not develop ESDP because two statesmen met in a seaside town and came up with a good idea. ESDP is directly driven by shifts in history’s tectonic plates – 9 November 1989, 11 September 2001, 7 August 2008. The world is reconfiguring itself constantly in response to those dates and events. Europe no longer figures on the radar screen of US strategic priorities except as a potential partner in distant theatres. China, India, Japan and South Korea are jostling for control of the crucial “Rimland” running from the Suez Canal to Shanghai through which a huge proportion of EU commercial shipping passes.<sup>6</sup> The very fact that the EU has recently launched the EU NAVFOR mission off the coast of Somalia is a tacit recognition of the strategic threat to the Union’s commercial sea-lanes posed by the growing chaos in the Indian Ocean. The African continent, so long seen as “Europe’s back yard”, is now host to new strategic players, including both local ones – South Africa, Nigeria – and distant ones – China, India and increasingly the US. Russia, for twenty years an absentee at the global strategic table, re-emerged with a vengeance in summer 2008, a newly determined player in the 21<sup>st</sup> century “great game”. Regional powers in areas of vital interest to the EU – the Middle East, South Asia, Central and South America – are asserting themselves in ways which cannot be ignored. In the EU’s near abroad (Balkans, Mediterranean, Caucasus) the Union is likely to find itself increasingly alone in the management of strategic challenges. The Georgian War of 2008 demonstrated that NATO has real politico-strategic limits and is now more of a problem in Eastern Europe than a solution; that the US has played an increasingly detached role in the border-land between Europe and Russia; and that the EU has little choice but to assume leadership in this sensitive part of the planet. The world may not yet be recognizable as a meaningful multi-polar system, but it is well on the way to becoming one.<sup>7</sup> The EU member-states individually – even the large and extrovert ones – cannot hope to weigh in on this new strategic chess-board without harnessing the collective muscle of their Union partners. The future will be dominated by *large, strategic* players.

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6. James Rogers, *From Suez to Shanghai: the future of European Union geo-strategy*. Paris, EUISS, Occasional Paper (forthcoming).

7. NIC, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*. Washington DC, 2008, [http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC\\_2025\\_project.html](http://www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_2025_project.html). See also Nicole Gnesotto and Giovanni Grevi, *The New Global Puzzle. What World for Europe in 2025*. Paris, EUISS, 2006.

The EU therefore has *no historical alternative* but to develop its strategic vision as fast and as far as it can. Over the past ten years, official self-congratulation about ESDP has sat uncomfortably with the reality that progress has been minimal – and above all *blind*, in the sense of lacking any clear strategic vision. While the technical, financial and managerial challenges have proven tricky but resolvable, *the key problem has remained political*. The EU’s Member States now need to grasp the political nettle and face up to their historic collective responsibilities instead of continuing to fiddle individually while Lisbon and Brussels burn.

I have been one of those who has consistently argued that we cannot expect miracles overnight, that ESDP will develop incrementally, that the EU has actually achieved a great deal in a short space of time, that it did not matter that France and the UK seemed to be pursuing ESDP for contradictory reasons – as long as they were clearly committed to it.<sup>8</sup> It is time to come clean: with a few honourable exceptions, the record, ten years on, is very meagre. Capacity transformation from legacy systems to usable instruments is deplorably slow. Deployment ratios are embarrassingly low. Delays and lack of cooperation and commitment are prejudicial to the EU’s credibility, let alone its effectiveness. And the incompatible world-views in London and Paris have become a real problem. This simply cannot go on. There are many very constructive suggestions for improvement. Nick Witney, Bastian Giegerich, Alexander Nicoll, Jean-Pierre Maulny, Fabio Liberti, Daniel Keohane, Tomas Valasek and others have generated a mass of entirely realistic proposals.<sup>9</sup> The issue is to implement them. But the problem remains overwhelmingly political.

## The Political Challenge

The EU urgently needs a “grand strategy”, defined by Yale historian John Gaddis as “the calculated relationship between means and large ends”. This involves several key requirements, many of which run totally counter to the collaborative

8. Jolyon Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*. London, Palgrave, 2007.

9. Nick Witney, *Re-Energising Europe’s Security and Defence Policy*, Report. European Council on Foreign Relations, 2008: <http://ecfr.eu/page/-/documents/ESDP-report.pdf>; Bastian Giegerich, *European Military Capabilities: Building Armed Forces for Modern Operations*, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008; Alexander Nicoll, “The long hard slog of strengthening Europe’s defence capabilities”, *Europe’s World*, Autumn 2008; Bastian Giegerich, *European Military Crisis Management: connecting ambition and reality*, London, IISS, 2008 (Adelphi Paper # 397); Jean-Pierre Maulny & Fabio Liberti, *Pooling of EU Member States’ Assets in the Implementation of ESDP*, European Parliament Directorate General External Policies of the Union, March 2008: [http://www.isis-europe.org/pdf/2008\\_artrel\\_142\\_08-02epstudy-pooling.pdf](http://www.isis-europe.org/pdf/2008_artrel_142_08-02epstudy-pooling.pdf); Daniel Keohane & Tomas Valasek, *Willing and Able: EU Defence in 2020*. London, CER, 2008.

mode which is the essence of EU decision-making. Grand strategy requires the sort of intuitive overview which rarely occurs in EU settings.<sup>10</sup> It runs counter to the specialization logic which underpins much of the activity of EU officials and institutions – the ever greater mastery of highly focused dossiers. Grand strategy must be based on the extraction of key but limited information from a large range of sources and its quasi-*instinctive* (rather than scientific or systematic) evaluation. Secondly, grand strategy demands the type of bold decision-taking and implementation from which Europeans generally recoil. The iterations of EU decision-making involve constant weighing of pros and cons, bargains and compromises, a little bit of this for the Greeks and a little bit of that for the Poles. Grand strategy, on the other hand, means fixing on an objective and sticking to it. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, a strategic approach must know how to respond to the unexpected. This requires agile leadership rather than iterative deliberations seeking common denominators. Leadership itself needs to transcend bargains and compromises and to demonstrate that followers are willing, indeed happy to be led. This again is foreign to the EU experience which goes to extraordinary lengths to incorporate the viewpoints of everybody, even of those who are hostile. And finally, grand strategy requires great discourse. From Pericles to Churchill, great leaders have known how to use words to transform strategic reality. And because words speak to the emotions, there tends to have to be an identity component in the magic. No EU leader has so far asked its citizens to go “once more unto the breach”.

At this point, many will say “then let’s forget about grand strategy for the EU will never achieve it!” But, as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds, such an attitude will increasingly condemn the EU to marginality in international affairs. Europe suffers from major handicaps in the emerging international pecking order: demographic decline, limited natural resources, geographical exiguity, military inadequacy. For the Union deliberately to add political fissiparousness to that list would seem perverse. The “debate” over “normative power Europe”<sup>11</sup> is over. ESDP now exists and is not about to go away. The power of example, commitment to international institutions, diplomatic solutions, multilateralism and law, the assertion of moral precepts, the primacy of human security and many other EU normative principles are valid and important. But they should be incorporated *within* a grand strategy, not proclaimed as an alternative to one. Robert Cooper warned back in 2003 that “there is a zone of safety in Europe and outside it a zone of danger and chaos. [...] Those who want to have a chance of

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10. The remarks that follow are adapted from John Gaddis’s lecture at Middlebury College, Vermont (16 May 2005) on “Why Grand Strategy is Tough for Academics”.

11. Karen Smith, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, Cambridge, Polity, 2008; Ian Manners, *Europe and the World*. London, Palgrave, 2009; Mario Telo, *Europe: a Civilian Power?: European Union, Global Governance, World Order*. London, Palgrave, 2006.

surviving an uncertain future should think in terms of arming and organizing to face it, while at the same time working for lasting political solutions. In a dynamic world, the worst policy is to do nothing”.<sup>12</sup> The time has come for the EU to think constructively in terms of power relations – what is the nature of power in the world today, how is its definition shifting, who wields it, what strategic objectives should the 27 aim for through the application of power in all its guises, in alliance or in partnership with whom, through the deployment of precisely which range of instruments? These are the questions at the heart of a grand strategic approach which the EU will ignore at its peril. How could the Member States set about the implementation of such an approach?

## The Way Forward

The EU cannot devise a grand strategy as long as there is fundamental disagreement about what the EU actually *is* and what it should be doing in the world. It was once a source of Euro-congratulation that France and the UK, at Saint-Malo, had jointly kick-started ESDP. Today, the comparison is startling. In the June 2008 French *Livre Blanc*, the EU framework for French defence and security thinking is not only omnipresent, it is *structurally fundamental*. Explicitly, the security of France and the security of Europe are considered to be coterminous. ESDP *is* a strategy. In the UK’s March 2008 document, *The National Security Strategy of the UK*, the acronym ESDP does not appear once and the all too few – and fleeting – references to Europe and to the EU are usually situated within a list of potential security collaborators for the UK, beginning with the US and the UN. The EU usually comes third. The UK’s approach to ESDP seems increasingly *anti-strategic*. 2008 also saw the launch of the first ever *Security Strategy for Germany* impelled by the perceived need to clarify the strategic thinking behind the increasing deployment of *Bundeswehr* troops on overseas missions.

It would therefore seem appropriate, in the first instance, to organize (*in camera* with no media presence) a trilateral summit between France, Germany and the UK to thrash out precisely where each of the three now stands in relation to the emerging new world order, to ESDP, to NATO and to the relationship between them. This conference should involve representatives from all political parties as well as key officials. The agenda should be exclusively focused on the question of whether each of these key nations can hope to achieve its broad strategic objectives without framing them primarily within an EU context. The aim

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12. Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*. New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003, pp. 55 & 171.

should be to develop a trilateral draft Security Strategy document, combining the compatible features of the three recent papers. The Brown-Sarkozy summit on 27 March 2008 managed to generate some degree of commonality of purpose.<sup>13</sup> At the macro-level, Paris and London claim to “share a common analysis of the organisation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century international order” and boast proactive plans for international development and the resolution of international crises. At the European level, the picture is more sober. The main motivation for cooperation is clearly financial rather than political or strategic. Opposition to ESDP among Tory MPs<sup>14</sup> (though not, it seems, among the UK public<sup>15</sup>) appears to be growing. The UK therefore faces a fundamental challenge. If the British cannot sign up, then France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain should not hesitate to take a joint lead in a similar exercise. Once the major EU Member States have embarked on a joint strategic approach to the rest of the world, the UK will eventually come around (as it always has in the past).

The second step should be to convene a special EU Council meeting to activate the strategic reorganization of ESDP. The EU can never hope to be a strategic actor of the same type as unitary states like the US, China or Russia. But, once broad agreement has been reached on strategic objectives, it can do a much better job of *organizing the inputs* of its Member States in accordance with their overall capacity and special resources. The reality is that the 27 Member States currently belong to five different divisions in terms of foreign and security policy inputs and capacity. This should be formally recognized and synergies developed within these divisions in order to maximize output and to task the respective Member States with different political challenges and objectives with a view to consolidating ESDP.

The various recent analyses of ESDP commitments referred to above suggest the following de facto breakdown:

- Division 1: UK, France
- Division 2: Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Poland, Finland, Czech Republic
- Division 3: Greece, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia
- Division 4: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, Hungary, Lithuania, Portugal
- Division 5: Cyprus, Luxemburg, Malta

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13. Joint UK-France Summit Declaration, 27 March 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27\\_03\\_08communiqué.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27_03_08communiqué.pdf).

14. See Liam Fox, “Britain, Europe and NATO: Heading in the wrong direction”, 31 January 2008, [http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj\\_id=142045&speeches=1](http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=142045&speeches=1).

15. According to *Eurobarometer* #67 (November 2007), p.149, 56% of UK respondents are in favour of “a common defence and security policy among EU member states”, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67_en.pdf).



The first two divisions should concentrate on their interrelations with one another, and should design bilateral or multilateral areas for cooperation and rationalization. The third and fourth divisions need to focus single-mindedly on sharing, pooling and specialization along the lines of the Maulny/Liberti proposals. Division 5 needs to identify niche capacities. Agreement is needed on the best ways of rationalizing procurement, planning, budgets, pooling, sharing, specialization. Targets need setting for budgetary rationalization: within 5 years, 30% of spending should be tied in to pooling, sharing, specialization arrangements; within 10 years, 50% etc. Preparations should go ahead for the drafting of a specifically *European White Book on Security and Defence*.

Thirdly, the European Council should agree on the establishment of an EU Strategic Advisory Body, similar in conception to the US National Security Council, whose task would be to feed strategic advice to the new officials appointed under the Lisbon Treaty (the Irish hiatus is simply a hiatus...), particularly the High-Representative and the European President but also the President of the Commission. Fourthly, there is an urgent need for the creation of a Council of Defence Ministers – as proposed by the recent French Presidency. Nick Witney has formulated a set of cogent and detailed proposals for the work of such a body, which one can only wholeheartedly endorse.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the new Council, in association with the EUMS, should concentrate on the “Comprehensive Approach” to a Single Planning and Conduct Capability synergizing the strategic and operational planning requirements of both civilian and military assets deployable under ESDP.

Fifthly, resolution of the ESDP-NATO stand-off is long overdue. All of the institutional and political suggestions of the recent French Presidency are constructive and important. If necessary, the EU should associate Georgia and Ukraine (in the same way as Turkey) with the ESDP/PSC/EDA policy processes. This should be complemented by the creation of an EU Caucus in NATO – as proposed by a recent policy paper.<sup>17</sup> This will reflect the growing reality that, until there is agreement within the EU, there can only be blockage in NATO. There may still be blockage thereafter, but that is another issue. At the same time, the EU should press for the creation of a direct interagency EU-US Council or Forum to engage in permanent strategic discussions with American friends & partners across the entire range of policy issues from climate change to agricultural subsidies. NATO can no longer act as the agency of choice for the management of transatlantic relations.

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16. Witney, loc.cit., pp. 32-36.

17. Daniel Fiott, “France’s rapprochement with NATO: Paving the Way for an EU Caucus?”, *European Security Review* #40, September 2008.

Finally, free-riders in European security terms should be identified and called upon to account for themselves. Since it is manifestly absurd for the EU-27 to be attempting to run 27 armies, 23 air-forces and 20 navies, a collective assessment of these forces and expenditures seems long overdue. Why, for instance, do so many countries need to have a *national* air-force (as opposed to a joint one, shared with neighbours or with others)? What could their “national” forces actually succeed in doing – against which air-borne adversary? And since such questions are being asked, why not push the logic a little further and ask why the EU could not agree to generate a single European air-space protection force, with common procurement, common training and common planning? Countries with a land-border with Russia can be forgiven for continuing to wish to emphasize territorial defence. But would it not make more sense for the forces of Finland, Estonia and Latvia to be reinforced by contingents from other EU Member States?

These are simply a number of ideas in order to launch a process. Let us imagine a “best case” communiqué following the Franco-Anglo-German summit suggested above. What should it contain? At the strategic level, it should refer to the EU’s need to develop a genuine security strategy, laying out its own collective strategic ambitions in the security and defence field, and the way in which those ambitions mesh with or complement those of the US, NATO and other allies and strategic partners, as well as the way they might hope to manage relations with perceived rivals or challengers. It should re-examine the meaning, ten years after Saint-Malo, of the key concept of European *autonomy*, stressing that this does not imply, first and foremost, *independence* from the US for its own sake (as a political objective or a principle) but rather a state of *non-dependency* (as an outcome) which would allow the EU to act as a better ally and not to continue to act as a brake on the US’s own strategic ambitions. There should be agreement to consider the EU as a strategic actor with a remit covering the “far abroad” – the Mediterranean and most of the African continent; the Mashrek and the Levant – meaning Lebanon, Israel and Palestine, the Gulf and the South Caucasus and above all the maritime “Rimland” running from Suez to Shanghai. A summit agreement should also state unambiguously the intention of all three governments to maximise the potential of the CFSP/ESDP provisions in the Lisbon Treaty by vowing to work together to make sure that, irrespective of nationality, the best individuals are appointed to the new top jobs, and by resolving at institutional level potential clashes of “turf”. It should include a rehearsal of the assets which a robust EU, blessed with a buoyant ESDP, might bring to the transatlantic table: commitment to resolution of regional crises in Africa; a new impetus – and new cash – for the Middle East peace process; a drive for a new type of EU involvement in Afghanistan; fresh thinking on the requirements for a breakthrough in the Iranian impasse; a new initiative on

counter-terrorism; and many other things. It should also capitalise on the real ESDP progress made under the French presidency with some more robust statement of improved and workable *mechanisms* for generating European military capacity, including targets for defence spending, pooling, rationalisation, deployability, sustainability. And it should feature an agreed statement on the ways in which permanent structured cooperation can be made to work in the interests of the EU collectively as well as in those of its Member States.

Are these things so difficult to imagine? Many of them are already either being discussed or actually set in motion. A grand strategic approach essentially requires their coordination and synergised implementation. Such an ambition is not beyond the EU. The challenge is to do it.



# Military Capabilities: Time for Capitals to Act

BASTIAN GIEGERICH<sup>18</sup>

Decisions to improve capabilities are made not by the EU or NATO, but by individual governments. All governments have undertaken defence reforms, but their efforts have been constrained by budget cuts, by the natural resistance of defence establishments to change, and most importantly by a lack of clarity about what constitutes the most effective shape for the nation's armed forces in an era of multinational operations of many different types. Within the framework of ESDP, headline goals have been defined and revised, progress assessed, shortfalls identified, and programmes initiated to remedy them. Extremely detailed military planning has been conducted in Brussels and a basic notion of what the EU and its Member States intend to do with improved capabilities exists, not the least in the guise of the European Security Strategy (ESS). In general, an overarching goal of all this activity and effort has been to generate capabilities among EU Member States that strengthen their capacity to conduct international crisis management missions. Nonetheless, as has often been observed, EU Member States seem to be unable to live up to their aspirations. Currently some 4% of all active armed forces of EU Member States are deployed on international operations. Hardly a number that impresses given the ambition expressed in the ESS. However, progress will not come from yet another round of goals defined at the EU level, but, rather, from difficult decisions being taken in EU Member State capitals.

Several developments in 2008 have revealed a willingness to search for pragmatic solutions. As holder of the rotating EU Presidency in the second half of 2008, France has pressed other members to focus anew on creating better capabilities for crisis management operations and stepping up coordination to achieve these. For example, plans were advanced to coordinate maintenance and use of transport aircraft, satellite intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and to carry out joint exercises of EU countries with aircraft carriers (France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom). One example of possible progress is that Paris and London have been pushing for a fund to pay for upgrades of helicopters – as well as training – so that they can be more easily deployed over a wider range of terrains as part of NATO, EU or United Nations missions. The fund

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18. This article is based on a recent IISS dossier written and edited by Bastian Giegerich and Alexander Nicoll, Director of Editorial, IISS: *European Military Capabilities: Building Armed Forces for Modern Operations*. London, IISS, 2008, <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/european-military-capabilities/>.

recently had its first expenditure when it contributed to the costs for upgrading Czech transport helicopters to be deployed to Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup>

A European Council declaration on strengthening capabilities of December 2008 offers clarification of the EU's level of ambition as far as the range and number of missions to be conducted under ESDP is concerned. The document also announced a fresh round of capability initiatives ranging from force projection, information gathering and space-based intelligence, and force protection to interoperability issues. Importantly, the declaration explicitly calls for the sharing and pooling of national capabilities as well as for voluntary specialisation on niche capabilities and collective procurement – this signifies a clear emphasis on non-traditional ways of creating and maintaining capabilities.<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding this undeniable dynamic, decisions on what capabilities to retain or develop will depend on each nation's distinct view on the role it should take in multinational efforts to address modern threats. Since contemporary threats in general do not appear to pose existential risks, the use of force and its place in the overall spectrum of means is discretionary.<sup>21</sup> Some countries will be far more ambitious than others. At one extreme, only comparatively large countries such as France and the United Kingdom can aspire to capabilities giving them strategic influence as well as tactical and operational weight. At the other, decisions on capabilities by small countries will be a function partly of the national threat perspective and partly of the degree of desire to play a role as a member of the EU, NATO or another grouping such as NATO's Partnership for Peace.

In practice, while decisions on future capabilities remain separate and national, they are heavily influenced by commitments to international operations that governments expect to undertake. There is a common understanding that the requirement for deployable troops is not likely to be temporary. An EU Long Term Vision document drawn up by the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2006 expected that deployments over strategic distances and to austere environments would be required, including scenarios that would require a substantial level of force. Even in the context of the EU's European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), generally assumed to encompass crisis response involving 'softer'

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19. See: Gregorz Holdanowicz, "Czech Mi-171Sh upgrades herald helo initiative". In: *Jane's Defence Review*, 7 January 2009, p. 11.

20. Council of the European Union, *Declaration on Strengthening Capabilities*. Brussels, 11 December 2008.

21. Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Paper 379. Abingdon, Routledge for the IISS, 2006, p. 7; Paul T. Mitchell, *Network Centric Warfare. Coalition Operations in the Age of US Military Primacy*, Adelphi Paper 385. Abingdon, Routledge for the IISS, 2006, pp. 18–19.

military operations than NATO, military actions could thus be of high intensity.<sup>22</sup> If these collective expectations are correct, there will be continuing and repeated demands on European militaries to contribute to multinational forces, whether configured by NATO or the EU or as coalitions. Each force will require a specific set of capabilities, depending on the precise mission, its duration, size, circumstances, location and terrain – and importantly, on the capabilities of any opposing forces.

## What Progress Has Been Made?

How close are Europe's military capabilities to meeting the demands of today and tomorrow? Capabilities comprise the assets and skills that nations can bring to bear to counter identified threats and to meet responsibilities. The only way to assess capabilities is nation by nation, since armed forces, budgets, threat assessments and deployment decisions all remain national.

Whatever common yardsticks are applied, there will always be an element of subjectivity. However, EU Member States are making advances in shaping their armed forces for the multinational operations in which they are increasingly being asked to take part. Governments have been deploying more troops overseas, as well as committing military assets to new multinational forces available for rapid deployment. Moreover, each country has given thought to the level and nature of activity that it is willing to undertake as part of efforts to shore up international security in the face of diverse and far-flung threats. All have undertaken defence reforms to replace the outdated military structures of the Cold War, albeit on the basis of reduced defence budgets. Overall, the picture is one of qualified progress.

It is also clear that much more could be done to modernise Europe's armed forces so that they have more personnel to deal with the world's problems and become better equipped, better able to operate alongside each other and non-European allies, more fitted to their missions and more cost-effective for the taxpayer. European countries would be more effective actors on the world stage if they were able to formulate a common vision of threats and the means to deal with them, and if they were able to resolve the squabbles that prevent NATO and the EU from working together. To a large extent, this would require the biggest countries, which account for a high proportion of European defence spending, to forge a new compact and to have the energy to implement it.

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22. European Defence Agency, *An Initial Long-Term Vision for European Defence Capability and Capacity Needs*. Brussels: EDA, 2006.

In addition to deploying more troops, Europe has achieved global reach: the fact that NATO operates far from Europe in Afghanistan, and the EU in Africa, is no longer the subject of debate. In spite of transport shortfalls that are being remedied, European countries plainly can sustain missions that are well “out-of-area”. However, only a small proportion of Europe’s active-duty personnel are available for foreign deployments. The average percentage of deployed land forces remains well below the modest usability target set by NATO (and accepted by the EU), despite a reduction in size of most militaries. In this regard, European armed forces (with some exceptions) are clearly unable to live up to the goals expressed by their governments.

In addition to having global reach, the operations in which European countries are now participating tend to have several characteristics in common: they are almost all multinational; they often begin by requiring deployments at short notice; they have narrowly defined objectives; they involve a wide range of tasks; and they are often of long duration. This places specific demands on the countries involved: they must have deployable forces; the forces must be able to operate together; rapid-reaction forces must be available; forces must have a high degree of flexibility and operational effectiveness; and deployments must be sustainable.

Past operations have exposed shortfalls in all these areas, and governments have sought to devise collective mechanisms, through the EU and NATO, to fill the gaps. However, while these initiatives have been valuable in identifying necessary improvements, they have been only partially successful in achieving them. This may be attributed again to the highly national orientation of decisions that affect defence capabilities. Be it NATO or the EU, collective defence and force planning processes do not add up to a capabilities development process.

At best, collective aspirations can begin to penetrate national assumptions over time – the reality is that defence budgets of EU Member States are planned out for some more years to come and there is limited room for manoeuvre. Thus, the collective tapestry of Europe’s strengths that can be woven by aggregating national assets into a European whole can easily unravel when individual national capabilities are scrutinised. The Capabilities Development Plan, launched by the EDA in July 2008, will seek to mitigate this challenge by helping participating Member States to develop their national plans in accordance with ambitions and available resources and also by facilitating the exploitation of multinational cooperation by providing data to Member States about what is going on in other Member States. It is thus a potentially very important tool for



Member States as they move towards a more defined capability development process.<sup>23</sup>

A key determinant of a nation's capabilities is the role it wants to play in addressing international threats. A country's level of ambition (in the military sense) is a function of its broader goals, which in turn are shaped by many factors: history, geography, military traditions, politics, demographics, foreign policy, threat perceptions, membership of international organisations, and economic and financial strength. Most European countries, facing demands for expeditionary forces, have attempted to set goals for the operational capacity of their armed forces and to carry out defence reforms.

European countries, if they meet their expressed targets, will steadily increase the military assets available for international operations, so that their collective capabilities will by 2015 be significantly greater than those available today. However, the ability of governments to set precise targets for the size, capabilities, frequency and concurrency of deployments varies widely, and there is scope for considerable improvements in the clarity of expressed levels of military ambition.

Realising expressed ambitions requires an effective process of defence reform, backed by political will. All EU Member States continue to be in a state of transition, and all are seeking to do more with less: that is, they are attempting to create effective, usable, flexible capabilities out of forces that, in many countries, have little or no operational experience. To achieve this, defence ministries must manage with smaller resources than those previously allotted to essentially static forces. Defence reform is therefore extremely challenging, requiring politically difficult choices. Reform that is effective, in the sense of enabling successful expeditionary operations, is not just a matter for defence ministries: it requires the support of finance ministries, as well as those government departments involved in security more generally. Crucially, it involves close coordination with departments responsible for providing aid and civilian assistance to complement the military aspect of modern missions. Military involvement in troubled situations will rarely achieve a solution by itself.

The size and composition of defence spending is one of the key factors that determine a country's ability to take part in operations. There has been a steady real-terms decline in European defence spending, which now accounts for a far smaller proportion of national economies than it did during the Cold War. Some governments have recently increased spending to help finance reforms and the

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23. See: European Defence Agency, *Background Note – Capability Development Plan*, 8 July 2008.

development of new capabilities. However, the available data indicate that there is an imbalance in most countries' spending, with too much being spent to maintain existing military infrastructure through personnel costs, and too little on investment in modern equipment and, in particular, research into future technologies. An additional factor is that, while some countries pay for operations from special allotments of money from central-government contingency funds, a significant number pay for them out of defence budgets. This restricts budget funding for the reforms that are necessary to enable armed forces to participate in operations, and to be effective when deployed. Thus, there is considerable scope for defence budgets to be spent more effectively, and to deliver better value to the taxpayer.

There is also scope to develop stronger industrial capabilities, to deliver better value, and to equip armed forces with what they need for today's operations in a timelier manner. Demand remains fragmented, with most procurement still carried out by nations acting alone. As a consequence, the supplier base is also fragmented, even though companies have expanded across borders. The onus is primarily on governments to take steps to harmonise their equipment requirements. It is not suggested that countries will have the same requirements, since each carries out an individual set of expeditionary roles. However, it is clear that greater coordination of needs and programme timescales is possible – this is increasingly being recognized as exemplified by the decision of seven EU Member States (Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) to begin work on the development of a Future Unmanned Aerial System based on common requirements.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, it is important that barriers to intra-European cross-border trade in defence items continue to be lowered as is the goal of the directive on intra-EU transfers of defence products. This initiative, likely to become EU law in 2009, would mean that EU Member States would stop to consider each other as third countries when it comes to defence related products.<sup>25</sup> Greater cooperation would enable industry to shape itself more effectively to meet customer demand. Given reasonable clarity in the future equipment programmes of major nations, private companies can be expected to create, through business decisions, the most effective industrial structure.

For political reasons, governments tend to retain expensive 'legacy' programmes that produce equipment that may not be of the highest priority for modern missions. Procurement programmes need, therefore, to be scrutinised to ensure that they are in tune with defence goals and operational needs. The sheer slowness

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24. European Defence Agency, *European Air Transport Fleet Launched*, Press Release, 10 November 2008, p. 2.

25. Brooks Tigner, "EU set to simplify cross-border transfer of defence products". In: *Jane's Defence Review*, 7 January 2009, p. 11.

of procurement processes exacerbates the problem, with costly programmes begun during the Cold War still using up large shares of acquisition budgets. This limits the amount that can be spent on technologies that could quickly enhance operational capabilities.

An important element of effectiveness in dealing with international threats is the ability to deploy military force rapidly – ideally to prevent a minor, localised problem from becoming a larger, long-term crisis. European countries, and Europe collectively, will have more influence as strategic actors if they have a rapid reaction capability and can be seen as ready to use it. While individual countries and NATO already had capabilities in this area, the development of the NATO Response Force (even though it has not attained commitment targets) and of the EU Battlegroups are important steps forward in this regard. It is also vital that capabilities, once built, are tested. However, their creation has a purpose that goes beyond the capacity for rapid reaction: it also acts as a stimulus for military reform, particularly for smaller countries for which even a contribution to an EU Battlegroup would represent a substantial commitment.

The final determinant of a country's capabilities is its willingness to use them. While leaders may collectively agree that an international military operation is required, their own decision to take part is a separate matter. To a large extent, decisions come down to politics, both domestic and international. Many operations are uncontroversial, while others require a case to be made by governments if they wish to take part. In most cases, domestic political debates in European countries have resulted in decisions to deploy troops to international operations. But politics is unpredictable, and the factors that shape political decisions go far beyond the world of defence. Similarly, the political will to sustain a deployment cannot be precisely measured, and can easily evaporate.

## **Time for Tough Decisions**

A rise in demand for military operations and a fall in resources to fund armed forces mean the day has long gone when European countries could afford to maintain large, static military establishments. Whatever the threat perceptions, strategic positions and ambitions of each nation – and it is acknowledged that these will differ widely across the continent – European countries must have usable armed forces. The uses to which they are put will vary enormously, from providing humanitarian assistance to undertaking combat operations, as in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is not self-evident that the capabilities of European countries fall well below their own strategic needs. European countries must make their own assessments of what they need from their militaries; the United States is not their benchmark. However, it is vital that European nations take the necessary steps to put their own assessments and policies into practice: to match their capabilities to the dangers against which they wish to guard, and the roles that they want to play.

First, it is obvious that, in spite of reforms intended to improve force-projection capacities, the proportion of armed forces available for use in international missions remains low. Why should it be acceptable that any part of a nation's armed forces cannot be put to use to deal with the principal threats that nations commonly identify? The taxpayer seems entitled to expect that armed forces should be usable and it seems that it is time for a change in mindset where it is the large share of forces that seems unusable under current circumstances that needs to be justified and not a government's attempt to increase the share of useable forces. To state this recommendation more neutrally, more effort should be made by individual governments to adapt force structures to the threats and purposes that are expressed in their policy documents.

Second, given the very wide range of capabilities that are needed for the multinational operations in which European countries participate, more thought needs to be given to how Europe collectively can provide them on a reliable basis. While infantry soldiers may be plentiful, those with more specialist skills are not. However, decisions to supply specific "niche" capabilities and to disperse with others can be sensitive for governments, which are always conscious of their responsibility for national security. The practical way to approach this issue may be for governments to come to bilateral or "small group" arrangements – rather than attempting large-scale (and potentially elusive) agreements in NATO and the EU – so that all required capabilities are available for operations without compromising national security.

Third, the capabilities required to achieve success in future operations will not just be of the military variety. Civil actors – local and international, official and non-governmental – will be involved in solving international crises. Governments need to ensure that these non-military capabilities are available and properly coordinated with military activities.

Fourth, governments could spend their defence budgets more efficiently, and deliver better equipment to the military in a more timely fashion, if they were able to better manage their procurement programmes. Necessary reforms include faster acquisition and better coordination with other governments facing similar requirements. Collaboration has so far been relatively ineffective, but

is the only means of delivering large-scale capabilities. Without it, governments duplicate efforts and spend money wastefully. Better coordination on equipment requirements would enable the supplier base to structure itself more effectively, delivering further savings to the taxpayer. Building better coordination and a stronger supplier base does not, however, imply greater protectionism or a “Fortress Europe”. To have the best forces at the best value, Europe must be open to all available equipment and technologies.

Fifth, governments should allot a higher proportion of budgets to technological research. The ability to develop the technologies that will equip tomorrow’s armed forces will, above all, determine the extent to which European countries can remain in control of their own destinies. Governments must also strive to achieve a better balance between personnel and equipment costs when budgeting for defence.

Sixth, there can be no effective reshaping of European militaries without clear goals. It is important that each nation, when determining ambition levels for its armed forces, set clear targets for such things as the number and types of forces it wishes to be able to deploy, and the concurrency and sustainability of operations. This, in turn, will guide decisions on defence budgets, force structures, equipment programmes and training. When carrying out reforms, it is essential to focus on capabilities that are required to meet the stated level of ambition and to dispense with others, though this may necessitate difficult political decisions.

Seventh, it is important that the new rapid reaction capacities of NATO and the EU are used. If not, the pledges made towards them will be increasingly open to question. These forces promise to increase Europe’s strategic influence – but only if they are demonstrated to be real.

Finally, European countries should use more effectively the organisational tools that they have available to them. NATO and the EU, as well as the United Nations and ad hoc coalitions, are instruments through which countries pool their efforts. Two large changes to these organisations have increased Europe’s capacity to address international threats. These are the expansion of NATO to include former Soviet-bloc countries, and the extension of the EU’s remit to include defence. Both were achieved after lengthy debates and in spite of doubts. Recent experience shows that two additional steps are required to further build effectiveness. First, the proliferation of national approaches to the use of forces in Afghanistan illustrates that NATO members urgently need to work more effectively together and make stronger efforts to develop a shared operational vision when undertaking challenging missions. Second, governments must stop assuming that a hierarchy exists under which NATO, with US participation,

takes on the toughest assignments while the EU undertakes “softer” missions involving a larger civil element, borrowing assets from NATO if necessary. This pattern is not firm policy – the EU’s defence mandate includes high-intensity operations. It is up to political leaders to choose the most appropriate tool to undertake a particular mission.

What should not be encouraged is any rivalry or lack of communication between NATO and the defence entities of the EU, organisations which, at the time of writing, share 21 Member States in common, out of 26 and 27 respectively. These states, whose taxpayers are burdened with the costs of dual membership, should act to align the two organisations’ forces and mission-planning processes using each body’s special capacities. These include, for example, NATO’s well-developed planning processes, and the ability of the European Defence Agency to bring political impetus to initiatives that could help Europe’s forces become more effective and deliver better value. The onus is on governments to make NATO and the EU work together to their collective benefit.

Two EU Member States stand out as strategic powers, capable of significant individual action. The policy orientations of the United Kingdom and France will, above all else, determine Europe’s ability to have strong and coherent capabilities in the future. Just as they launched the EU into the defence realm with their 1998 St-Malo accord, they have it within their power strongly to influence Europe’s future choices. President Nicolas Sarkozy has made it clear that he wishes to reinvigorate EU defence efforts, and was expected to introduce new initiatives during the French rotating EU Presidency in the second half of 2008. In particular, France said in its June 2008 White Paper that it would encourage EU members to set more ambitious targets for intervention capabilities, along the lines of the original EU Headline Goals. Sarkozy has also indicated that he would like to return France to the NATO integrated command structure, which it left in 1966. This would increase the potential for better NATO–EU coordination. However, it was not clear how other EU members – and particularly the United Kingdom – would respond to new French initiatives.

With Franco-British impetus, European countries could develop capabilities that would enable Europe to play an effective role in addressing international crises, at good value to the taxpayer. Without it, progress towards this goal is likely to remain heavily qualified. Fixing the problems identified will take national governments making difficult decisions along the lines outlined in this article – not more progress catalogues or headline goals on the EU level.