Peace without money, 
war without Americans: 
challenges for European strategy

SVEN BISCOP*

Can Europe become an autonomous strategic actor only when the United States tells it to? ‘Sir, autonomy, Sir!’ To this Belgian author such a prospect seems a frustrating contradiction in terms. But what may not work in theory can and does work in practice: autonomy really is the order of the day. Just as Europeans are becoming aware that vital interests require resolute action in their broader neighbourhood, the focus of American strategy is shifting to Asia and the Pacific. Autonomy is being forced upon the Europeans, who were surprised at having had to convince the United States of the need to intervene in Libya in 2011. The Mali crisis in early 2013 confirmed the picture: Washington is prepared to support European action, but expects Europe to take the initiative. That amounts to—at least regional—strategic autonomy.

Since the Libya crisis this newly acquired autonomy is constrained, however, by the aggravation of an old problem: lack of means. Under pressure from the financial crisis that began in 2008, defence budgets are (once more) being slashed across Europe, but most markedly and most worryingly in Britain and France, the continent’s only real military powers in terms of both strategic reflection and the will to deploy. That said, the military is but one instrument to be funded, and one to which ideally Europe need not resort, if the many other instruments required in a truly comprehensive strategy for the broader neighbourhood are effective. The ramifications of the ‘Arab Awakening’ pose challenges of an enormous scale, but in times of austerity budgets commensurate with that scale cannot be allocated. Nor can Europe ignore challenges in other parts of the world.

Peace without money, war without Americans: this, then, is the double challenge that European strategy-makers are facing.

As austerity limits our means, and as the US ‘pivot’ to Asia limits the extent to which we can count on American means, it becomes ever more important to prioritize, to ensure that what means do remain to Europe are used in the most apposite way. To quote Winston Churchill: ‘Gentlemen, we have run out of

---

* The author warmly thanks Alyson Bailes (University of Reykjavik), Richard G. Whitman (University of Kent), Daniel Fiott (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) and Marc Otte, Jo Coelmont and Thomas Renard (Egmont Institute) for their insightful comments and suggestions; he is also grateful for comments by the somewhat less Euro-enthusiast reviewer, which greatly helped him to strengthen the argument.
money. It’s time to start thinking.” Making the best use of our means implies maximizing synergies and ending the dispersal of Europe’s foreign and security policy efforts. No single European state can aspire to replace American power and singlehandedly address the geopolitical turmoil in our neighbourhood. In the face of some strategic challenges, the national interest of each state compels Europeans to act collectively.

The platform for such collective action already exists: the European Union controls substantial means of its own and (unlike NATO) has a comprehensive range of instruments covering all dimensions of foreign and security policy. Indeed, through the EU, Europeans have already attempted to forge a grand strategy integrating all these dimensions: the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS). That document has not, however, produced clear enough prioritization. Consequently, EU external action has not sufficiently proved it has added value. Ten years on from the publication of the ESS, therefore, it is both fitting and urgent to revisit EU strategy and decide which priorities now urgently require collective action to complement the foreign policies of the European states.

**European strategy: implicit, impeded, inevitable**

The ESS was adopted fully ten years after the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty that established the EU. An implicit ‘European way’ of doing foreign policy had emerged through the practice of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), but it was only in 2003 that the great divide among Europeans about the US-launched invasion of Iraq and the resulting lack of any influence on events there drove member states to codify this practice. The resulting ESS emphasizes that Europeans care about the same issues as the United States—the British emphasis—but will not necessarily tackle them in the same way—the Franco-German emphasis. But does the United States still care about our concerns today, and can we still afford ‘our way’?

The strength of the ESS, which remains prominent in the discourse of both EU and national officials about European foreign policy, is its very positive, even optimist narrative. The subtitle of the ESS says it all: ‘a secure Europe in a better world’. Combining democracy, capitalism and ‘big government’, Europeans have constructed a very distinctive society. Notwithstanding significant differences between countries, there is a ‘European Social Model’. What is more, it works: Europe is the most socially equal of all the world’s continents, providing the greatest security, prosperity and freedom to the greatest number of citizens.

---

1 Though the quotation is also attributed to New Zealand physicist Sir Ernest Rutherford, in this article on strategy the author chooses to believe Churchill is the source.
4 That and the fact that, unlike most EU documents, the ESS, short and free of jargon, is actually readable.
6 The Lisbon Treaty added the emphasis on equality in article 2 of the Treaty on European Union: ‘The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and
Only where governments provide for their citizens equally in terms of these core public goods are lasting peace and stability possible. Empirical research shows that even countries that are poorer but whose citizens are more equal will be more stable, healthier societies than richer but less equal countries. 7 This fundamental idea is at the heart both of European integration and of European foreign policy.

Outside Europe, the best way to guarantee our security is to encourage other governments to provide for their citizens as we do for ours, to the mutual benefit of all. For where governments do not so provide, tensions will arise, instability, repression and conflict will follow, and citizens will eventually rebel and regimes implode, violently or peacefully. In other words, European interests are best served by promoting respect for the universal values that underpin our own model in the rest of the world. This core phrase summarizes the ESS: ‘The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order.’ 8

Within Europe, the same idea is crucial in engendering a ‘feeling of solidarity and sense of belonging in Europe’. 9 However, a strategy founded on promoting our social model outside the EU cannot be credible if we no longer adhere to it ourselves—that would kick the feet from under the strategic narrative. European leaders obsessed with austerity risk mistaking financial stability and safeguarding the euro as ends in themselves; by protecting them to the detriment, rather than to the benefit, of the security, prosperity and freedom of Europe’s citizens, they will gravely undermine the European project. Pursuit of such mistaken priorities will result in profound internal instability—hardly a base for decisive external action. Fortunately, the fundamental purpose of the Union is dawning anew on Europe’s leaders, along with the realization that jobs and growth are more likely to contribute to it than any golden rule.

From this underpinning idea follows the choice of a specific way of doing foreign policy. The ESS exhorts Europeans to be preventive, tackling the root causes of instability; comprehensive, addressing the security, economic and political dimensions simultaneously; and multilateral, working with partners. It codifies how to do things—but it does not tell us what to do. It does not provide, nor has it been used as a basis to generate (and continuously and systematically debate and review), specific common objectives on which to focus EU foreign policy, complementing the foreign policies of its member states.

---


8 European Security Strategy, p. 10.

9 The dwindling of which, as a result of the EU’s response to the financial crisis, is deplored by the Future of Europe Group of the foreign ministers of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland and Spain in its *Final Report* (Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt, 2012).
That does not stop the EU from being active—far from it; but it is active mainly in a programmatic and reactive way. Many policy decisions amount to extending or adding to existing budget lines, without setting clear objectives or even assessing the effectiveness of past programmes. This approach, often decried as the Commission approach, holds sway only because too many member states are too exclusively focused on their national foreign policies and do not invest sufficiently in making the collective EU instruments and institutions (that they have themselves created) work. In the absence of clear objectives, the various strands of EU engagement (aid, trade, diplomacy, defence) tend to lack coordination, efforts at coordination with member-state initiatives are limited as well, and results are sub-optimal and short-lived. Europeans do not consistently consider the big issues of the day collectively, unlike the other Great Powers, which often have a much clearer idea of their interests and objectives and thus act purposively (which is not synonymous with successfully), while the EU takes the initiative much less often. Consequently, effective prevention remains difficult, and the EU tends to react late to what it has not been able to prevent. Furthermore, the allocation of the means bears little relation to any prioritization of objectives.

The resulting image is easily tested: ask anyone working on, for or with the EU whether he or she sees Europe (in all meanings of the term) as a game-changer in international politics today, or even simply as a strategic actor, and the response will be hesitation at best; most will simply answer ‘no’. Nobody would hesitate for a second to give a positive response were the same question asked about the United States or China.

EU engagement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo can serve to illustrate that activity is no substitute for strategy. The EU is a major donor (as are its member states), keeps the Congo on the agenda of the international community, has twice intervened militarily (in 2003 and 2006), and has two missions in place to assist with the reform of the police and the armed forces. But do Europeans determine the future of the Congo? In fact, what do we seek to achieve that merits, and gives a joint purpose to, all this activity? If the country is a priority, then why does Europe not contribute to the UN force stationed there permanently since 2000? If not, then why bother at all? Without clear objectives and more than token ownership by member states, no amount of activity will produce strategic effect.

Fortunately, there increasingly are good examples of strategic engagement as well. From launching a naval operation, Atalanta, to combat Somali piracy (in 2008), the EU gradually evolved a comprehensive strategy for the Horn of Africa, later formalized into a document. Europe and the international community will have to remain committed for a long time to come, but Somalia does now finally seem to be on the road to stability. Informed by its engagement in that region, the EU also conceived a regional strategy for the Sahel. Within this framework it took the initiative on Mali, envisaging a political roadmap towards a legitimate...

---

10 And this is combined with the fact that most member states do not have a substantial national strategic debate either, and thus hardly engage with issues of strategy at all.
national government and a consensus with the Tuareg population, and planning a training mission to enable the Mali armed forces to deal with the security situation in the north of the country, which deteriorated drastically as a consequence of the Libyan crisis. Unfortunately, when in January 2013 jihadist militias suddenly seemed poised to take the capital, which would have rendered this EU strategy obsolete, the EU as such proved unable to respond and a French military intervention had to stabilize the situation.

In both cases European interests are quite obviously at stake: seaborne trade in the Horn; energy—as well as fear of general instability and terrorism—in the Sahel. Many officials and observers, though, still seem to regard ‘interests’ as a notion that does not or should not apply to the EU, considering the pursuit of interests to run contrary to their idealized view of an altruistic EU foreign policy. The public justification for Operation Atalanta, for example, was stated in terms of a desire to assist the people of Somalia—a laudable purpose, of course—while referring to the protection of European trade, at least initially, was seen as ‘not done’, as if the one excluded the other. Some constantly point to differences between the national interests of the member states which, in their opinion, render consistent collective action impossible. Of course, geography and history generate differences in the focus of national foreign policies. But that does not detract from the fact that objectively, member states, as component parts of an integrated economy with a distinctive social model, have shared vital interests:

• preventing threats against Europe’s territory from materializing;
• keeping open all lines of interaction with the world, notably sea lanes and cyberspace;
• assuring the supply of energy and other natural resources;
• managing migration, to maintain both a viable workforce and a viable social system;
• mitigating the impact of climate change;
• strengthening international law, notably the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a foundation and underpinning of international stability;
• preserving the autonomy of decision-making by preventing undue dependence on any foreign power.13

We need not be timid in defending these interests—that is the point of policy-making—as long as we continue to do so in a way that does not harm the legitimate interests of others—that is the point of the ‘European way’ of foreign policy. What is more, no member state can defend these vital interests on its own any longer. In the 2010 Lancaster House Agreement, the UK and France declared that they could not imagine any situation in which the vital interests of one were threatened that would not also threaten the vital interests of the other; if Paris and London have come to this conclusion, surely so must the other Europeans?

13 Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont, Europe, strategy and armed forces: the making of a distinctive power (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).
Attitudes are indeed shifting. At the December 2012 meeting of the European Council, the heads of state and government noted that ‘in today’s changing world the European Union is called upon to assume increased responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security in order to guarantee the security of its citizens and the promotion of its interests’. 14

Another shared characteristic between the Horn and Sahel cases is that both concern regional strategies. The EU cannot, however, escape the debate about the level of grand strategy at which the ESS operates—that is, foreign policy as a whole. Without an encompassing grand strategy in which to anchor the various regional and sectoral strategies, conflicts will inevitably arise between them, perfect though each in itself may be. How, for example, is the emphasis on security cooperation with Algeria in the Sahel strategy, which was further strengthened by the hostage crisis at the Amenas gas plant in January 2013, to be reconciled with the same country’s imperviousness to EU human rights objectives? Without a grand strategy, furthermore, the EU cannot sensibly react to events, such as the US ‘pivot’ towards Asia or the global financial and economic crisis, that affect several or even all of its sub-strategies and may require a reprioritization and reallocation of means between them.

Raiders of the lost art: European strategy-making

The conclusion is not that collective EU foreign policy and the method that the ESS prescribes for it must be discarded. Quite the opposite: in today’s multipolar and interdependent or ‘interpolar’ world (the term coined by Giovanni Grevi), 15 where global powers with interwoven economies are competing for scarce resources and facing complex global challenges that none can solve alone, the preventive, comprehensive and multilateral method remains the most promising. No single European state can rise to all of these challenges on its own. That means that EU strategy needs to be completed so that collective action can be undertaken where it adds most value to national action. Which priority objectives are to be collectively achieved through the method of the ESS? That requires a systematic assessment of Europe’s common interests and of the evolving threats and challenges facing the EU.

An attempt at such an assessment was made in 2008, at the instigation primarily of France and Sweden, but the ill-timed exercise, when member states were still waiting for the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty to be completed, produced only a soon forgotten implementation report on the ESS—long in words but meagre in substance. 16 Ever since, there has been great reluctance to reopen the EU-level strategic debate. Within the EU institutions, many of the officials involved in preparing the 2008 report prefer to avoid another potentially futile exercise.


International Affairs 89: 5, 2013
Copyright © 2013 The Author(s). International Affairs © 2013 The Royal Institute of International Affairs.
The current High Representative, Catherine Ashton, has expressed her lack of interest on many occasions. None of the ‘big three’ member states (Britain, France, Germany) is particularly interested either, notwithstanding the apparent contradiction between engaging in a very elaborate national strategic process (in Britain and France especially) while assuming that at the much more complex EU level one can do without. Furthermore, the gap between the challenges identified in these countries’ national strategies and the means available at the national level becomes ever wider. The 2013 French Livre blanc makes liberal reference to autonomy but has perforce to acknowledge that many desired capabilities can only be generated if other Europeans chip in. The only member states that continue to push for a strategic review are the ‘middle powers’—Sweden, Finland, Poland, Italy, Spain: countries that have a view about the world but have also realized that they can only implement it collectively. That coalition proved insufficiently grand to tip the balance, however. Following an inconclusive informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in March 2012, these countries therefore launched an informal process, tasking a consortium of think-tanks with producing a report on a ‘European Global Strategy’ in an attempt to keep the debate alive.17

The arguments against a collective European strategic review are easily refuted. The EU and the member states refer to the ESS less often now than in the first years after its adoption; this reinforces the point that the ESS has reached its age limit—relevance requires revision. True, a real strategic debate would lay bare some of the differences between member states; it is precisely because they are divided and therefore collectively inactive on several crucial issues that a debate is necessary. While the consolidation of the newly established European External Action Service is a priority, the EEAS is but a means, which can only be meaningful if it serves clear ends. Financial means are under pressure; but, as stated at the outset of this article, that renders prioritization even more important. And as long as the number of drafters is kept below the number of pages they produce, it is certainly possible to produce a concise and readable text once more. Far too often, indeed, the debate has focused on form and process—does the EU need a new ESS-type document and who will draft it?—rather than on substance—what should EU strategy be? Had half the time spent on debating the former been spent on the latter, a new strategy would have been set a long time ago. In comparison, the US has updated its National Security Strategy (the 2002 edition of which was closely followed by the ESS) twice in the intervening years, in 2006 and 2010.

In fact, the outcome of a European strategic review need not necessarily be a document, or just a single document. The aim is first of all to create an enduring awareness in all capitals (and in the EU institutions) that strategy and grand strategy exist, and that choices have to be made at both levels, by each member state where possible but collectively through the EU where necessary. The purpose is not to enshrine a set of EU priorities that remain valid for ever more, to be carved into

17 Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Real Instituto Elcano, Towards a European global strategy: securing European influence in a changing world (Stockholm/Warsaw/Rome/Madrid, 28 May 2013). The Egmont Institute, Brussels, was one of the project’s associated institutes.
the walls of the EEAS building on the Schuman Roundabout in Brussels—that
would be the opposite of strategy. Nor would another statement of principle,
merely paraphrasing the existing ESS, bring much added value. What is required
is suppleness in systematically reassessing the importance of our interests and the
threats and challenges facing us, evaluating past actions, and reprioritizing objec-
tives and the allocation of means accordingly, thus producing a strategy for collec-
tive EU action for the short to medium term.

Just as a national foreign minister produces a policy statement at the start of
each term of office, so the High Representative should organize an update of EU
grand strategy for each five-year term, involving the presidents of the European
Council and the Commission, the European Parliament, the capitals, and relevant
experts. In the full knowledge that a large part of the job will naturally consist in
reacting to events, he or she must also set a proactive agenda and assess on which
issues Europeans together need to try to actively shape, rather than just undergo,
events. A High Representative who is a politician should have an idea of where he
or she wants to leave his or her mark. Rather than compiling a long and useless list
of all the national priorities of the member states, or summing up all existing EU
external policies, EU grand strategy should prioritize those foreign policy issues
(1) that all member states regard as priorities because their shared vital interests are
most directly at stake and (2) on which there is the greatest added value in collec-
tive action through the EU. The result would be a mandate for the EU institutions
for the next five years.

Only when the substance of a strategy is decided should the question of form
be addressed. Ideally, each update of grand strategy would generate a document
adopted by the European Council, each replacing its predecessor (so that at this
stage it would replace the ESS). The EU needs to legitimize its foreign policy and
sell its grand strategy—to its citizens and parliaments, and to the outside world;
for the clearer it is about its strategy, the more predictability and stability will
ensue in its external relations. That does require a document, a strategic narrative,
which need not spell out everything though. On the one hand, the specifics can
be elaborated in regional and sectoral strategies (commissioned by the European
Council); on the other hand, certain assumptions can remain implicit (hence the
importance of the process as such, which will make clear to member states where
each stands on key issues). The narrative should always remain short and sharp,
and be both positive and ambitious, starting not from the threats facing us but
from what we want to achieve. A threat-based agenda will produce a reactive,
defensive or even antagonistic foreign policy; a positive agenda will stimulate
initiative, transparency and partnership in dealing with the challenges.

If this strategic exercise were undertaken today, two such challenges stand
out as immediate priorities. Europeans have to deal with the consequences of the
‘Arab Awakening’ in their broader neighbourhood; and they have to decide, now
that the United States is pivoting towards Asia, which responsibilities they must
assume themselves for security problems outside their borders—quite a few of
which result from that same Arab Awakening. Without much money or American
support, neither will be easy. Both surpass the capacity of any individual EU member state, while all member states have an evident interest in a stable neighbourhood and in a clear idea of who is responsible for which security issues. At the EU level collective policies on both issues already exist, but on neither have they been very effective. Surprisingly, neither has so far been the subject of a real strategic debate. There are, of course, other important challenges that require collective action; but because of their urgency and scale, these two issues are most prominent on the agenda today and can therefore serve to illustrate how Europeans can achieve strategic effect by making optimal use of the institutions and instruments they have already created. The key is strategy.

The broader neighbourhood: more of the same?

In the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) the EU had an elaborate strategy for its southern neighbourhood—it just never implemented it. Through bilateral partnerships and offering the proverbial carrot (mostly access to the European market), the ENP, in direct application of the ESS, purported to promote more equal access to security, prosperity and freedom as a way to durable peace and stability. In fact, the EU settled for the semblance of stability by supporting any regime willing to help it fight terrorism and illegal migration, even by dubious methods, and regardless of its domestic record. That included all three regimes that have now been ousted, in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Member states’ reluctance to jeopardize privileged bilateral relations did not help. Europe having thus become a status quo power, the Arab Awakening happened in spite of it, not thanks to it, which greatly handicaps European leverage in its aftermath. Not surprisingly, after half a century or more of European support for the local dictators, our lessons in democracy are not now well received. Yet vital interests are obviously at stake and Europeans must engage with and attempt to influence the region: not so that our neighbours look up to us, but because, with the Gulf states, China and others gaining influence, we cannot afford for them to look away from us either. They should see Europe, too, as a partner.

As early as spring 2011 the EU announced its response to the Arab Awakening—but in a classic example of the programmatic approach to foreign policy.18 Under the heading of ‘More for More’, extra means were allocated in order to provide more support (the ‘three Ms’: money, mobility and market access), on a differentiated basis, to the countries that undertake more reforms—which reads like an exact summary of the ‘positive conditionality’ envisaged by the ENP when it was launched in 2004. How is ‘more of the same’ to make a difference? The extra money (€1.2 billion on top of €5.1 billion for 2011–2013, and a 40 per cent increase from the previous 2007–2013 budgetary period to €18.1 billion for 2014–2020, for all 16 eastern and southern neighbours) could only be generated at the EU level,

but is not of an order that will allow us to determine the future of a country like Egypt (and it pales in comparison to the €280 billion that the EU through various mechanisms has committed to bail out member states since the financial crisis hit us in 2008). More importantly, more money will not produce more results if the policy that is funded itself continues unaltered. But in spite of its meagre results, the EU remains reluctant to fundamentally review the ENP.

The EU thus continues to make policy for rather than with its southern neighbours. The ENP is about paternalism rather than partnership, which fundamentally limits its attractiveness. As Isaiah Berlin noted, paternalism ‘is an insult to my conception of myself as a human being’; any individual might, he supposed, ‘prefer to be bullied and misgoverned by some member of my own race or class, by whom I am, nevertheless, recognised as a man and a rival—that is as an equal—to being well and tolerantly treated by someone from some higher and remoter group, someone who does not recognise me for what I wish to feel myself to be’. Even if the EU were suddenly to start implementing the ENP as originally intended (which is unlikely), Brussels would do better to accept that conditionality will not work in a part of the globe where what it preaches is perceived not as universally valid, as having been briefly enjoyed once and to be regained in the future, as it might be for a Cold War dissident in Poland or one of the Baltic states, but rather as foreign and emanating from the former colonial powers. People in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya rose up in a genuine popular movement against oppressive regimes, at great peril to their lives, to recover their dignity. Simply embracing a foreign model (from Europe, Turkey, the Gulf or elsewhere) is felt to jeopardize that dignity once more, especially as their own history and culture offer a rich source of inspiration for a new and legitimate regime of their own.

Europe should rejoice in this popular awareness, for the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya do in effect prove the universality of the aspiration to equality in terms of security, prosperity and freedom. That people have become citizens, actively participating in politics, voicing their priorities and concerns, and protesting when their rights are violated, is the most effective safeguard against a return to authoritarianism. The mass movement resulting in the army bringing down the first post-Awakening Egyptian president, Morsi, in July 2013 highlighted how much power the armed forces still hold, but also demonstrated the power of the people. Where new regimes have come to power, they speak the language of democracy and human rights, even if only because they feel compelled to do so. Far from leading the EU to abandon its values-based grand strategy, then, the Arab Awakening should prompt its reaffirmation—but in the full realization that the tactics must change. Short of invasion and regime change, outside intervention will not deliver sweeping change, as the ENP vainly promised. A more equal society cannot be mechanically engineered from the outside, by sticks and carrots. It can emerge only as the result of a genuine domestic movement, which external

---

actors cannot create but can help to foster, support and consolidate, as long as the local actors perceive that events are controlled by themselves, not by foreign well-wishers, no matter how benevolent. This requires a very different ENP.

First, before programmes and projects comes classic diplomacy: engagement, permanent and incessant, with all actors on the now unfrozen political scene, to create mutual understanding and to reinforce the climate in which a democratic and human rights discourse appears natural and inevitable. This, under the EEAS, has begun to happen. Seen from secular Europe, the rising role of religion in politics understandably and justifiably causes concern, though in a region where religion plays a pervasive role in public life it should not have come as a surprise (secular, western-oriented groups command but marginal domestic influence). ‘Political Islam’ comes in many guises, but if the Arab Awakening produces a Muslim democracy, Europe, where Christian democracy provides both the president of the European Council and the chancellor of the largest member state, ought to welcome it, treating the new incumbents as a political family like any other while they acquire the experience of governing. Given the primary public concern with political and economic equality, there is no reason why the normal political structure of majority and opposition should not apply.

Second, Europe has a lot of technical expertise to offer. Reform of the justice and security apparatus (and the legal framework) to equip it to serve a democratic polity is of evident importance; the EU has plenty of experience in deploying its judges, police officers and other civil servants to that end. Another priority area is the media: training and exchanges can help to consolidate free media and dispel the temptation to over-regulation in the face of an extremely varied and lively and therefore not invariably responsible post-censorship media landscape. Private investment in the media sector by European groups could help ensure independence and plurality. Expertise should be offered, but not imposed, for that would minimize its impact. Even when the EU rightly feels that a government needs more support than it is willing to admit and should act more resolutely, as in the case of border security in Libya, the interests of that government will eventually lead it to take decisions. But where the willingness to accept an offer of support exists, the EU should grasp it and be more generous with personnel and funds as well as ambitious in its objectives.

Third, the biggest challenge that all southern neighbours face is the economic one: how to provide prosperity to surging populations? The region has seen little real development, in no small part because of an absence of investment, notwithstanding the elaborate legal framework created by the ENP. This is not surprising, given the existence of rampant corruption and crony capitalism. It is striking that in an era of delocalization of European firms, few if any have opted to invest in the Middle East or North Africa. In these circumstances, EU funds are best allocated to generate more funds, both from Europe’s private sector (including through private–public partnerships) and from international players, to invest in the region. Major infrastructure projects, notably in transport and (renewable) energy, are particularly promising and will benefit Europe and the region alike.
Sven Biscop

But establishing the rule of law and halting corruption, at least where foreign investments are concerned, are indispensable conditions; perhaps the Asian experience can be helpful in this respect.

Fourth and finally, Europe should more fully integrate foreign and security policy in a revamped ENP. Regime change, the involvement of external players on a massive scale, and continuing armed conflict are drastically changing alignments between the states of the region. It is in Europe’s immediate interest to avoid new regimes having recourse to a confrontational foreign policy as a way of distracting attention from domestic challenges, as it is in the interest of all states in the Middle East to avoid escalation of the Syrian civil war, which has already turned into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, into a full-blown international sectarian war. Similarly, all states in the Sahel face the same challenge of roving militias in that vast territory. Both these threats demonstrate that Europe’s ‘real’ neighbourhood, where its vital interests are at stake, extends beyond the ENP area (eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Maghreb and the Middle East), into the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf (and Central Asia). There is thus ample scope for joint foreign policy initiatives with governments in the ‘broader neighbourhood’; the prerequisite is that the EU decides what its foreign policy objectives are. Effective action further presupposes that Europeans know when and where they are willing to consider military intervention—the other major strategic debate that this article urges the EU to undertake. There remains one imperative: Europe cannot hope to make a fresh start with its neighbours if it does not change its stance on Israel and fundamentally review its posture in the Middle East peace process.

Real partnership in these various fields, that is, joint policy-making and action, may enable Europe to build a more fruitful relationship with the new regimes in the ‘broader neighbourhood’. But what of the regimes that are continuing in power? Should the EU attempt uneasily to carry on as if nothing had happened, condoning the authoritarian traits of one regime while supporting the revolution that brought down another? The fate of those regimes will depend on their citizens, not on the EU; Europe can only make clear that it would extend the same equal partnership to a reformed or a new regime as it does (or should do) to those new governments already in place. Conditionality thus cannot be entirely abandoned: for both old and new regimes it must be clear that Europe has red lines, that if a certain threshold is crossed there will be consequences for the relationship—but that should be an ultimate resort, the system’s emergency brake, not its gearbox.

The added value of acting together through the EU is clear: the institutional infrastructure for dialogue with our partners exists, more financial means can be brought to bear, and the critical mass of experts (police, customs officials, judges and others) required to deploy civilian missions cannot otherwise be reached. At the same time, the required diplomatic effort will have to be undertaken at EU and member-state level simultaneously, while channelling private investment to the region is something that—once the EU has created the framework—only national governments can really do.
Ultimately, we need to ask whether such a very different ENP should still be called the ENP. Perceptions matter greatly in international affairs. In order to make a clean break, perhaps the EU would do well to abandon the ENP brand.

**Defence: and what will Europe do?**

In the realm of ‘hard’ security, the Arab Awakening and its aftermath have taught the EU hard lessons. An effective regional strategy must be truly comprehensive, that is, it must include security and defence. The EU cannot credibly engage with the region but pass the buck whenever a crisis occurs—all the more so as the United States, to which we usually pass the buck, is less and less engaged. Alas, there is no European consensus about our responsibilities in the ‘broader neighbourhood’, as the lack of support for the interventions in Libya and Mali demonstrates. Prompted by the US ‘pivot’, there is a growing awareness that the latter question can no longer be avoided: if the Americans are no longer going to do things for us, we urgently need to decide what it is that we need to do ourselves. In December 2013 the European Council will address military capabilities, crisis management procedures and the defence industry. At the instigation of its President, Herman Van Rompuy, it is likely also to pose the fundamental political question: to what role does Europe aspire as a security provider outside its own borders?

This question must be asked of ‘Europe’, not of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). At the 2013 annual conference of the European Defence Agency, Van Rompuy stated his main concern to be not the CSDP as such, but ‘the state of defence in Europe’. The obvious point has never been officially stated before: one can draw the maximum benefit from ‘pooling and sharing’ of capabilities only if member states’ total armed forces are taken into the balance. The capabilities debate cannot be limited to some theoretically separable part of the armed forces available to the CSDP. Similarly, the strategic debate that should drive capability development cannot be limited to problems likely to be acted upon through the CSDP. The job is to define overall priorities for the use of the military instrument, in support of the vital interests and the foreign policy of the EU and its member states. Therefore, the logical political forum to set such a European military strategy is the EU, but without any prejudice to action by the able and willing under UN, NATO, CSDP or national command—a choice that will be determined by the conditions of each individual case. One thing is certain: with the United States focusing on Asia, either Europeans will decide on strategy and make use of the NATO command structure whenever necessary, or nobody will. At a stroke, the ‘pivot’ has rendered the CSDP–NATO debate obsolete. The question is no longer in what circumstances the EU should act and in what circumstances NATO, but whether Europeans will act at all, for the Americans will no longer do it for us—and they no longer care whether we act under the EU or the NATO flag.

---

The regions and contingencies in which Europe’s vital interests are most directly threatened by the potential use of force should constitute the responsibilities that Europeans assume as a security provider outside their own territory, and upon which they are therefore willing to act. In (1) crisis management, Europeans must be able to act across the full spectrum of expeditionary operations, from evacuation, support to humanitarian relief, and assistance and training, to peacekeeping, peace enforcement and war. But a military strategy also encompasses (2) prevention, through a permanent forward presence in priority areas, and (3) deterrence, by maintaining a credible power projection capacity at all times. Setting priorities does not mean that Europe will never address any other issues, but that these are what it will prepare and plan for. Nor does it mean that the military is the only instrument with which these priorities can be addressed; but it does mean that Europe must be prepared to act forcefully if, and only if, its permanent preventive policies fail.

Three priority responsibilities emerge from an analysis of interests and threats: taking the lead in assuring peace and security in Europe’s ‘broader neighbourhood’; contributing to global maritime security; and contributing to the collective security system of the UN.

‘Even in an era of globalisation, geography is still important,’ states the ESS: Europe’s near abroad is the most obvious priority. That it will remain volatile for years to come goes without saying; the question is to what extent Europe feels responsible; that is, in which scenarios must we consider military action?

Interstate war, including spillover of a civil war, must always be prevented or ended. The UN Security Council (UNSC) is likely (though not guaranteed) to take action in any such eventuality, and Europeans will then probably act as part of a broader coalition, notably with the United States, and preferably always with regional actors—but on their own if necessary. Civil war, particularly when the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) arises (in case of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide or ethnic cleansing), would ideally be addressed by regional actors, but given the limits of will and means European intervention will often prove necessary. In such cases, Europeans are more likely to be the only or the leading external actors, but preferably still in coalition with regional actors, as in Libya and Mali. Unless the government of the country in question requests intervention, a UNSC mandate is much less certain. As in Syria today, but also in Georgia in 2008, the feasibility of military intervention may be constrained by the implication of external powers, the chance of any benefits being outweighed by major negative side-effects, or an unacceptably high risk of casualties. Intervention may then be limited to preventing spillover and possibly supporting what Europe deems the legitimate party in the conflict. Whether they have intervened or not, Europeans have a responsibility to stabilize any post-conflict situation, including through peacekeeping, security sector reform, and training and assisting local armed forces. A permanent military presence through cooperation

with regional partners would be an important confidence- and security-building measure, provided it is firmly anchored in a political partnership and does not run counter to EU democracy and human rights objectives.

While the United States will undoubtedly continue to play a role, Europeans will increasingly define the strategic and operational priorities: Europe must take the lead in maintaining peace and security in this broad region.

The ESS also states that ‘in an era of globalisation, distant threats may be as much a concern as those that are near at hand’. The most direct distant threat is a disruption of maritime trade (which accounts for 90 per cent of Europe’s trade overall). Maritime security is most commonly associated with piracy in the Gulf of Aden, but the same trade route can be threatened anywhere between Antwerp and China: hence our vital interest in maritime security in Asia, as well as in other parts of the globe such as West Africa. Furthermore, piracy cannot be solved on the sea only, and that holds true for other threats: the tensions between China and its neighbours clearly call for more than gunboat diplomacy.

It is beyond Europe’s means to play a leading role in maritime security worldwide, but it can take the lead in its ‘broader neighbourhood’ and adjacent zones. In Somalia, Europe through the EU has proved itself able to deal with the most likely threat, piracy. The EU is well placed to forge international coalitions and to initiate the comprehensive strategy required to address the underlying causes of piracy. A threat that is less likely to materialize but that would be dramatic if it did is a blockage of the Suez Canal as a consequence of war: Europeans would have to play a major part in the international coalition that would undoubtedly act in that scenario. In Asia, piracy should be a matter for action by local actors, but a permanent European naval presence, engaging in exchanges, training, and patrolling with local partners and promoting cooperation between them would constitute an important confidence- and security-building measure—much more effective than adding the odd European ship to the American fleet. In the Arctic, too, where the main issue is maritime safety rather than security, Europeans by being present themselves can promote multinational cooperation between the various other actors with stakes in the region.

Given the volatility of its own neighbourhood and the burden of maritime security, Europe’s appetite to engage elsewhere is likely to be limited. Yet Europeans cannot ignore crisis and suffering in other parts of the globe, because maintaining international law, especially the non-use of force and respect for human rights, is itself a vital interest. Without it there can be no international stability and thus no flourishing international trade, nor any multilateral cooperation in tackling pressing global challenges. These require that gross infringements be consistently acted upon. Europeans have a responsibility therefore to contribute to the UN collective security system. That contribution need not just be counted in European blue helmets—at the request of the UN, Europeans can deploy under NATO,

---

23 This scenario is elaborated in Back from the future. European military capabilities horizon 2025: options and implications, report of the EUISS Task Force on the Future of European Military Capabilities (Paris: EUISS, May 2013). The present author was a member of the task force; James Rogers and Andrea Gilli were the lead authors of the report.
CSDP or national command, including in support of regional organizations such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States—but it cannot be limited to paying into the budget of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Europe needs an effective UN in case of crisis in its own neighbourhood. And the UN can only be effective if it is generally perceived to be so, and not just when the interests of the permanent members of the Security Council are at stake.

Assuming these responsibilities requires capabilities. The current European level of ambition for expeditionary operations is still that of being able to deploy up to an army corps or 60,000 troops within two months, and sustain this force for at least one year, as first set out in the EU’s 1999 headline goal. During the past decade Europeans have consistently deployed more than 60,000 troops, counting all national, NATO, CSDP and UN operations in which they have participated. But if a grave crisis had arisen elsewhere, only through serious improvisation could they have deployed a corps in addition to all these ongoing operations. And never have they undertaken major operations autonomously, that is, relying on European enablers and in implementation of a European strategy. That is precisely what will be required in the future, however, as the United States expects Europeans to take charge of security in their own neighbourhood.

Europe’s preference is for operations with a light footprint, at an early stage before a problem escalates, in support of local and regional forces (through air operations, as in Libya, or training missions, as in Somalia and Mali). Given the customary reluctance of local parties to see large numbers of western soldiers on their territories, and the wish of European governments and public opinion to avoid casualties in their own ranks, this is quite justified. It would be a strategic error, though, to assume that all crises can be solved by such means. An air campaign can achieve its ends only if there are friendly ground forces to support in the first place. Events in Mali illustrate that combat operations may be necessary to create the preconditions for training missions. And even if this approach is now yielding results in Somalia, it should not be forgotten that the country has been in turmoil for two decades. A light footprint also comes with a price, albeit of a different kind. Not all conflicts can be nipped in the bud. Ending interstate or civil war, or preventing the latter from spilling over, demands large-scale operations, as will the inevitable post-conflict stabilization. And the latter will undoubtedly have to be sustained over many years to be effective.

Europeans may shortly withdraw from Afghanistan, but continuing and looming commitments will not allow them to withdraw from the world. A presence in Somalia and Mali will be demanded for a long time to come, and may well need to be extended to other countries in the Sahel. When the civil war in Syria finally ends, there is likely to be a need for a military presence on the ground to keep the peace, perhaps with preventive deployment in neighbouring countries first. Sustaining these inescapable commitments, and in addition shouldering a fair share of the burden of global collective security under the aegis of the UN, as well
as meeting the imperative of being able to respond rapidly and with major forces to any crisis in the near abroad: for this range of demands the existing headline goal does not suffice.

What level of ambition would be both real, relative to the threats to Europe’s shared vital interests, and realistic, relative to its political, economic and military weight? First, Europe needs a permanent strategic reserve: the ability to mount a decisive air campaign and to deploy up to an army corps, as a single force if necessary, for combat operations in Europe’s broader neighbourhood, over and above all ongoing operations. This de facto ‘double headline goal’ may seem fanciful, but it is merely the corollary of the rate of deployment of the last decade. Second, it needs maritime power: the ability to achieve command of the sea in the broader neighbourhood, while maintaining a global naval presence in order to permanently engage with partners, notably in Asia and the Arctic. Finally, in the ‘post-pivot’ era it needs regional strategic autonomy: acquiring all strategic enablers, including air and maritime transport, air-to-air refuelling, and intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) to allow for major army, air and naval operations in the broader neighbourhood without reliance on American assets.

A strategic debate can lend purpose to the mantra that Europe needs more capabilities: if it is not clear why, parliaments and citizens will not be persuaded to pay for them, and defence planners will not be able to decide on the right capability mix. Britain and France more than any other EU countries have an interest in a strategic consensus. Without it, we risk replicating within Europe the situation that today exists between the United States and Europe, with Britain and France continuing to call the shots on operations, and the other EU member states choosing to join in or abstain but having no real influence on Franco-British decision-making. That is not in the interest of the other member states; for whether they supported an operation or not, afterwards they are very likely to find its follow-up on the EU agenda anyway—as when Germany abstained from the vote in the UN Security Council on the intervention in Libya only to see that intervention become an EU responsibility. But nor is it in the interest of Britain and France, for they would for ever have to mount ad hoc coalitions, without knowing in advance on whose support they could count, and all the while seeing their means decreasing. And, with the latest French Livre blanc reducing the level of ambition for army deployment by 50 per cent, to 15,000, contributions by other member states gain in significance.

Conclusion

The countries of Europe may well continue to avoid debating collective strategy, but they cannot avoid doing strategy in the real world. Confronted with the Arab Awakening and with security threats in their near abroad, to name just the two most obviously pressing issues, they must choose a course of action. For most, the option is to act together or not to act at all. But even a choice for inaction is
Sven Biscop

still strategic behaviour: a policy choice with long-term effects on the values and interests of the policy-maker. Those countries that retain a significant national strategic posture are quickly running out of means and thus out of options unless they can spur more countries to act alongside them. They may choose to do that on an ad hoc basis, crisis by crisis and region by region; but if they want to be sure of achieving the required critical mass, they must seek a European strategic consensus.

Strategic behaviour can be improvised, but its effects are more likely to be positive if the policy-maker debates and decides on strategy beforehand. As Colin Gray points out: ‘The only difference between having and not having an explicit grand strategy lies in the degree of cohesion of official behaviours and, naturally as a consequence of poor cohesion, in the likelihood of success.’ Of course, foreign policy to a large extent means reacting to events. But a well-defined set of priorities enables an assessment of which events are more important to deal with and of action to deal with them rapidly, as well as to deal with issues proactively in order to shape the environment and prevent (more) undesirable events.

Never waste a ‘strategic anniversary’, then: ten years after the adoption of the ESS is a symbolic moment to help generate momentum for a collective European strategic review. A new grand strategy can deliver a strong and credible message: Europe has an idea and will set out to promote it. The December 2013 European Council on defence is the ideal launch-pad as it has already generated a debate about military strategy, and is likely to produce some initial political guidance and, we may hope, a mandate to take this debate further. The next logical step would be to commission a review of the ESS, the grand strategy for foreign policy as whole, which any military strategy must serve. The ESS is a milestone in European strategic thinking, but should not be its terminus. Reviewing it and setting strategic priorities for action should be number one on the task list of the new High Representative who will enter office after the 2014 European elections.

25 As evidenced by the author’s experience in local politics: before every election an anniversary to be celebrated, with the free publicity that it brings, can conveniently be found or engineered.