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A Realistic Ambition: Setting Priorities for CSDP

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The 2008 '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 the European Council in December 2008 decided, after a long debate, 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 invalid, but because it has been half-hearted about implementing it. Rather than amending the ESS, the European Council adopted a *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World*. The report did not meet expectations for a true strategic review. It provides a concise overview of implementation, confirms the holistic and multilateral approach, and 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.

The problem is that one is now left with the impression of unfinished business. The report can therefore only be the end of the beginning: once started, the exercise must be brought to a good end, regardless of one's initial opinion about its opportunity. On the basis of the report a true strategic review can yet take place. On the one hand, such a review will lead to a more complete ESS, notably in terms of objectives: today the ESS mostly tells us 'how' to do things – it is much vaguer on 'what' to do. The result will be a *grand* strategy, because that is the scope of the ESS already today, embracing all of the instruments and resources at the disposal of the EU and the member states, and because that expresses the high level of ambition which the EU as a global power must have. On the other hand, this review will determine the topics on which more detailed 'sub-strategies' to the ESS have yet to be adopted.

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is undoubtedly one the major areas in which more strategic thinking is required.

The elaboration of a military strategy?

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 CSDP operations though, resulting in a missing link between the overall political objective in the ESS – "to share in the responsibility for global security" – and CSDP operations and capability development. Quantitatively, CSDP 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, 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 CSDP, 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 mobilise 60,000 additional troops. It is equally obvious however that even the combined CSDP and NATO level of ambition still falls far short of the total combined armed forces of the EU-27: 2 million troops. Here 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 organisational divides – whether operations are conducted through CSDP, NATO, the United Nations 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 CSDP, 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, what reserves does that require, and what capacity must be maintained for territorial defence? In all probability the result will be that Europe does not need 2 million uniforms.

Elaborating such a CSDP strategy will require a thorough debate, but some outlines can already be discerned. Because of its proximity, the neighbourhood logically appears as a clear priority. In the ESS, "Resolution of the Arab / Israeli conflict is a strategic priority" – although that clear statement does not necessarily translate into proactive engagement – and the report adds that "We need a sustained effort to address conflicts in the Southern Caucasus, Republic of Moldova and between Israel and the Arab States". But if the neighbourhood is a clear geographic priority, it is less clear in which types of situations the EU will undertake which type of action. Whether the 'broader neighbourhood,' including Central Asia and the Gulf, is a priority as well should also be debated. Next to the neighbourhood, only Iran is singled out as a priority, and the EU has indeed been "at the forefront of international efforts to address Iran's nuclear programme," as the report states. Other conflicts are mentioned in the ESS: "Problems such as those in Kashmir, the Great Lakes Region and the Korean Peninsula impact on European interests directly and indirectly, as do conflicts nearer to home, above all in the Middle East" – whether that implies the EU should actively contribute to their resolution is not clear at all. Sub-Saharan Africa has been an important area of focus for CSDP, though the strategy behind it is not always clear – e.g., if the EU twice

intervened in the DRC at the request of the UN, why was the third request refused? This demonstrates that without strategy, it is impossible to define what operational success means. Other strategic players are becoming increasingly active, but are mostly unwilling to contribute to crisis-management on the African continent – what are the EU's priorities there? Securing Europe's lines of communication with the world, of which the operation off Somalia is an example, is a more obvious priority.

Importantly, the collective security system of the UN, and therefore of the EU, 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 (mandated) crisis management and peacekeeping operations. In particular, if anywhere in the world the threshold to activate the mechanism of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is reached, the EU, in view of its support for the principle, and in view of its vital interest in upholding international law, should contribute.

Capabilities

All of these commitments require deployable military capabilities that the EU is currently lacking. A substantial increase in deployments is only possible in the medium-to long-term, as a 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 EU-27 together must be capable. A resolute choice in favour of pooling could reduce intra-European duplication and thereby 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.

Permanent Structured Cooperation can be a very flexible instrument, allowing all EU member states to participate, if they so choose, according to their own means, in the way that they choose:

- Member states wanting to take part can declare which contribution, of which size, in which timeframe they are considering; in which specific capability areas, and / or with which force packages, and / or with regard to which longer-term, future capabilities.
- Simultaneously, the participating member states, with the support of the European Defence Agency (EDA), can agree on criteria that apply to each specific contribution, regardless of size, in terms of deployability, sustainability, interoperability and per-capita investment in equipment, in addition to a minimum level for participation in EDA programmes and, perhaps, operations.
- The EDA can then assess the opportunities for different forms of cooperation and pooling in accordance with member states' declared intentions, allowing member

states to decide which contributions they will offer on a national basis and which in cooperation, in which format, with other member states.
- This will result in a set of concrete capability objectives, to be achieved by pre-identified units, some national, some multinational, in an agreed timeframe.
- The EDA is responsible for monitoring progress and assessing contributions against the agreed criteria and the evolving needs, as well as continuously updating and proposing opportunities for cooperation.

One specific capability that ought to be focused on is 'gendarmerie-type' forces. Most analyses of the current security environment agree that today's threats to the EU countries differ from what we have witnessed in past. Not only do the threats cross traditional state borders, blur the distinction between inside and outside and take on various forms, but they also strengthen and depend on each other. As a consequence, they must be tackled by various means, such as military, police or administrative support, and they cannot be dealt with one by one, but rather as part of the whole picture only. The ESS has acknowledged the holistic approach from the very beginning, emphasising the link between different threats and stating that different instruments and capabilities should be brought together as all the threats require a mixture of responses. It also believes that the EU is particularly well equipped for a comprehensive approach to crises management.

The lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan have vindicated the ESS's conviction that nothing can be achieved by purely military means. They have also confirmed that even if we know it is necessary, the implementation of a common civil-military crisis management is a great problem in reality. Although military leaderships are not as afraid of 'mission creep' as they were in Bosnia in the 1990s, we still lack sufficient capabilities to bridge the gap between a high-end military operation and a low-end law enforcement mission. The same problem remains: soldiers are not trained and equipped to fulfil law-enforcement tasks and police are not ready to work in a violent environment.

However, there is an option that may serve as a remedy to the gap between military and police operations. The European Gendarmerie Force (EGF), fully operational since July 2006, is not part of the EU institutionally, but clearly aims at providing the EU with the necessary niche capability: police forces with military status. The 'gendarmerie-type' forces are a flexible instrument that can be deployed under both military and civilian command, thus providing the missing link between the two. At the moment, only six EU countries contribute to the EGF (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Romania; Poland is associated and Turkey is an observer to the EGF), but their forces have already been deployed under the EU flag in Bosnia. It cannot be expected that countries without a gendarmerie tradition in their force structure would introduce one. The tasks, however, will remain and there is a need to deal with them. Giving regular soldiers some quick additional training in handling a crowd before sending them on a mission cannot be a long-term solution. An option might be a 'gendarmerie minus' or 'military police plus' – not creating a proper gendarmerie as

known in France or Italy, but expanding the role of the military police outside the scope of the internal military order and training them in engaging with civilian populations. The Polish military police / gendarmerie may serve as an example of such transformation.

The issue deserves a high-profile debate at the EU level and the current Trio Presidency is well suited to launch it, as Spain is one of the EGF members and has long-term experience with this type of force. Even if the final decision remains with the member states themselves, the EU debate would help to attract the attention of politicians and European publics alike. Implementation of a comprehensive EU crisis-management solution will not be successful without filling niches that have the potential to undermine all previous efforts, be it by high-end military forces or low-end preventive assistance.

Conclusion

2010 is an important year for makers of strategy. President Obama will undoubtedly mandate the elaboration of a new National Security Strategy (NSS). At the NATO Summit in April 2009, the drafting of a new 'Strategic Concept' has been tasked. If it wants its interests and priorities to be taken into account, the EU must make sure to have its voice heard. Rather than every member state participating individually, EU strategy should be the basis for the European input in the debate: only where the NSS and the ESS overlap, can a truly shared NATO strategic concept emerge, reflecting the growing importance of the EU as a global security actor. 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 must 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. CSDP is an obvious priority. A continually proactive stance must follow.

The current Trio should focus on the following issues in particular:

- The debate on an EU grand strategy must not wait for the next ESS review in four or five years' time. Instead, the Trio should keep the strategic debate high on the agenda of CSDP in particular, possibly feeding the parallel work on the new NATO strategic concept.
- The debate should focus on linking the EU's overall objectives to particular tools. Sub-strategies may be a useful instrument in this respect, allowing for better formulation of concrete programmes and their implementation.
- The European Defence Agency should be used in the implementation process, as well as the new options included in the Lisbon Treaty.
- The idea of comprehensiveness should guide implementation, building on the EU and its member states' comparative advantages in crisis management.