

Revising the European Security Strategy: Building a secure Europe in a better world

Number 35 October 2007

This article takes up the call of the European Parliament and President Sarkozy, amongst others, that the European Security Strategy should be revised in light of recent changes in the nature of the threats and challenges confronting Europe. We need to reappraise where the strategy is leading us in practice, where the gaps might be and what revisions are necessary. To become a genuine strategy it should contain clear targets and objectives and detailed action plans for their achievement. 2008 should be the year in which the first such review is undertaken.

The author endorses the call adopted by the European Parliament and developed by Karl von Wogau MEP, Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE) of the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) that the European Security Strategy of 2003 should be revised in light of the subsequent evolution of the geopolitical challenges that face the EU.¹ It is an idea which also seems to have support from a number of member states. President Sarkozy has said that France will press for a bolder ESS when it assumes the rotating presidency next year, aiming to turn the continent into a global power with a decisive role in promoting a more just and effective world order.²

Time to reappraise the Security Strategy

The European Union was founded on an aspiration that Europe would never again be plunged into internecine warfare. Hence, since its inception the EU has done much to build peace within the continent. It has encouraged many new members to share its values of democracy, human rights, economic liberalism and support for the rule of law, and to join its ranks. Its erstwhile ideological foe, the Soviet Union, imploded thereby relieving Europe of its need to maintain huge standing armies facing eastwards. At the same time, economic growth and globalization have delivered steadily rising living standards for European citizens. In truth, we have never had it so good.

Nevertheless, a number of different and evolving threats and challenges remain, for which the EU needs to prepare. Hence, in 2003, it published its European Security Strategy (ESS),³ which set out the principles, priorities and *modus operandi* of how the EU intends to protect and promote its security. While recognizing that Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world,⁴ the EU also wanted to set out its own distinct approach to security issues (an ambition mainly stimulated by an aversion to the US Administration's unilateralism).

¹ 'The implementation of the European Security Strategy in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy ESPD', Draft Report of AFET, Rapporteur Karl von Wogau, (2006/2033(INI), 12 May 2006.

² John Thornhill, 'Sarkozy in drive to give EU global role', *Financial Times*, 27 August 2007.

³ 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', *European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003. Available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.ASP?id=266&lang=EN&mode=g

⁴ *Ibid.* p.1.

We may be approaching a good time to reappraise this strategy: To see where it is leading us in practice, where the gaps might be and whether revisions are necessary. Indeed, in some ways the existing document is simply an exposition of European threat assessment and underlying principles to guide subsequent actions, rather than a genuine strategy – with agreed targets and objectives and detailed action plans for their achievement. The document could now benefit from becoming a more substantive piece of work with greater sophistication and deeper analysis and prepare the ground for new objectives in the civilian and military crisis management area beyond the Headline Goals (2008 and 2010).

Whither robust intervention

EU Member States have accepted that they have a ‘responsibility to protect’ the innocent. The ESS refers to the need to develop a strategic culture that “fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention”⁵. This is grounded not just on humanitarian grounds, but also because instability, conflict and state failure have a detrimental impact on our own security in this interdependent world. The crucial adjuncts to this greater preparedness directly to intervene in crises, is to invest more effort into conflict prevention and in post-conflict peacebuilding. Far better to try and avoid the crisis in the first place, but if it does occur, proper reconstruction in the aftermath will improve our chances of forestalling a repeat.

Iraq is a warning that any physical intervention into another sovereign state can only be contemplated when certain specific criteria are satisfied. Any revision of the ESS, therefore, should include an exploration of what such criteria might be. For instance, when should the EU intervene (and when not), how should it best bring all of its relevant policy instruments to bear, how will it determine when it has achieved its objectives, and when should it withdraw?

Without a clear political mandate, united approach and agreed exit strategy, interventions can become mired; dragged down by indecision, lack of clear purpose, and draining domestic political support. Essentially, this is what happened in Iraq, where the US found it impossible to impose a new democracy compliant to US regional political and economic interests. Its major ally in the invasion, the UK, saw its peacebuilding efforts swept away by US indifference and (eventually) overwhelming indigenous resistance.

The Afghanistan operation threatens to go down the same path towards stalemate, growing local resentment, heavier casualties and ignominious defeat. Already, the British, who are supposed to be trying to pursue a ‘hearts and mind’ strategy, are calling up US aircraft to drop bombs on Taliban positions, with inevitable deaths of innocent locals. Moreover, we have a split command; with US forces not exclusively under NATO direction and often conducting operations that fail to minimize civilian deaths. Even on the peacebuilding side the situation is bad, with no effective coordination and a series of national bilateral plans producing duplication, waste and confusion.⁶ The EU’s increasing involvement in the country has also had its problems, as demonstrated by the recent abrupt replacement of the Operation Commander for EUPOL.

ESDP and common purpose

These previous examples provide powerful succour to those who see the need for, and value of, ESDP working to a common mandate, drawn from political consensus underpinned by a

⁵ Ibid. p.11.

⁶ Lord Ashdown, ‘We are failing in Afghanistan’, *Guardian*, 19 July 2007.

collective security strategy. Unfortunately, however, the practice has not always been so smoothly cohesive. Although the launch of an ESDP mission requires political consensus, this does not necessitate everyone contributing materially. No-one needs have a problem with that. But what it should require is that all those who do contribute, do so according to the pursuit of a common purpose and common rules of engagement. If Member States are participating in operations for different reasons and some are not prepared to accept the risks faced by others within an ESDP coalition, this can seriously damage operational efficiency, undermine morale on the ground and tarnish the EU's reputation as a serious security actor.

Although the importance of agreeing and pursuing common operational mandates is crucial before launching ESDP missions, participant Member States also need to be prepared to respond flexibly when circumstances of the ground change. For instance, the German forces in EUFOR DRC were still insisting on departing the DRC on a pre-ordained date, even though the second round of elections in that country (the security of which was the rationale for the deployment) had been postponed.

Where Europe has acted through ESDP the missions have often been relatively modest in size, scope and aspiration. This partly reflects realism about what is possible. It is wise to avoid the dangers of over committing and/or being too ambitious. Nevertheless, this circumspection in no way detracts from the very useful contribution that ESDP missions can make to crises and conflicts. A precise, well-targeted and early intervention can achieve far better results than a far larger effort, applied clumsily and too late.

Another lesson being learned is the importance of doing one's homework thoroughly before entering a theatre of operations. This means finding out about ethnic breakdowns, political relationships, cultural sensitivities, historical grievances, and so on, as much as about the terrain in which EU troops will operate. Instead of imposing solutions from outside, EU missions need to enable legitimate local actors to take ownership of the peacebuilding process. Investing in those who have a vested interest in resolving conflict and who will be there for the long run is crucial to successful interventions.

Recalibrating threats

The ESS laid out the major threats facing the EU as Terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), regional conflicts, state failure and organized crime. But what requires further in-depth analysis now is how these various factors interact in different settings and how best the EU can bring to bear its different instruments and capabilities to address them.

We need each of the three pillars working in harmony to provide efficient and effective policies to counter contemporary threats. For example, tackling state failure on Europe's periphery could well require an ESDP intervention and Commission-funded development assistance, buttressed by strong border controls. Combating terrorists could well necessitate sending troops overseas and strengthened security services, as well as a strategy for winning the hearts and minds of the terrorists' potential support base through development assistance, educational programmes and cultural exchanges.

Now that some of the initial hysteria about the terrorist threat has receded, we can revisit how best to tackle it. In many ways, the ESS conclusion that terrorism "poses a growing strategic threat to the whole of Europe"⁷ is overplayed. Yes, terrorists are able to kill lots of European

⁷ 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', *op. cit.*, p.3.

citizens using readily available means. But we do have to get this in perspective, because to fail to do so will play into the terrorists' hands.

Al Qaeda is a disparate network with a unifying ideology, but it consists of a relatively small number of activists. It strives for its message to be amplified around the world, it craves that its members and potential conscripts feel part of something much bigger and more significant than it really is. This form of nihilistic radicalized Islamism has failed to win over any significant portion of the Muslim world and we should be doing nothing to change that.

Clearly, the ESS needs to provide some insights into the balance that needs to be struck between counter-terrorist activities and upholding the human rights of EU citizens. We have to assess how far the ESS aspiration for "better coordination between external action and Justice and Home Affairs policies"⁸ has been realized.

There is a caveat to the above. The juxtaposition of radicalized terrorists, rogue regimes and WMD – particularly nuclear weapons - is a terrifying prospect and one that *could* pose a strategic threat to European security. If the ultimate weapons of terror fall into the hands of those who would have no compunction about using them, this would be catastrophic. This has led some to conclude that we should be far less complacent about the pressures currently being applied to the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Even some arch-‘realists’, such as Henry Kissinger, are now saying that reasserting the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons would be a “bold initiative consistent with America’s moral heritage”.⁹ The ESS should acknowledge that trying to stop proliferation without addressing its root causes is almost bound to fail. The major symposium on WMD being organized by the Council on 13/14 November would be a good time and place to start this reappraisal.

Some consideration might also be given to the possibility that imperatives for tackling different threats may clash with one another. The classic recent example is Iraq, where an invasion predicated on removing the threat from Saddam’s WMD has created a failing state in which radicalized terrorists have grown in strength and number.

Further improvement required

It is also time to audit progress towards the more efficient use of EU defence and security assets. In order to achieve a better return for defence spending, EU Member States need to speed up the reconfiguration of their armed forces to make them suitable for deployment in today’s ESDP missions. Simply presiding over a withering of unusable forces as budgets are constantly pared back is the antithesis of a sensible defence strategy. On the positive side, the revolving Battle Group concept is now up and running. On the downside, the Headline Goals for key capabilities are far from reached.

The way to get more ‘bang for the buck’ is to pool and/or share military assets. The European Defence Agency has made some progress here, but far more still needs to be done. It is crazy to continue to try to maintain so many national production capabilities and separate research and development efforts in defiance of clear trends in market economics.

⁸ Ibid. p.13.

⁹ George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, ‘A World Free of Nuclear Weapons’, *Wall Street Journal*, 4 January 2007.

The ESS would also be stronger for a greater focus on homeland security issues. These would include natural disasters (especially given the projected impact of climate change); energy security (we have witnessed Russia's coercion vis-à-vis its gas supplies to Europe); protection of critical infrastructure (vulnerabilities can be exploited to cause disproportionate harm to EU citizens); protection of borders (as the trafficking of various illicit goods increases and the problems of economic migration persist).

As the ESS evolves and more ESDP missions are launched, so the European Parliament, which continues to extend its authority over external relations, will need to be able to enhance its ability to oversee activities in this field. According to two well-informed insiders:

*“In response to the growing role of the EU, in particular through ESDP operations, which are creating a demand for an ever-increasing CFSP budget, the EP is demanding greater and more timely flow of information from the Council in order for it to carry out its responsibilities as a budgetary authority.”*¹⁰

Conclusion

It was Helmuth von Moltke who said that ‘no battle plan survives contact with the enemy’.¹¹ Yet, he did not mean that military/security strategies are worthless: he meant that military leaders have to conduct extensive preparation of all possible outcomes. The same applies to the ESS. It should be a ‘living’ document that has to be able to respond flexibly to rapidly evolving threats if it is to retain its usefulness.

We do not want an overly-detailed document that becomes an unwieldy ‘albatross’ through being constantly altered. A reappraisal every five years is about right. Additional framing and analysis can provide a more comprehensive and effective document (perhaps with an upper limit of 10,000 words – compared to 4,000 at present).

To become a genuine strategy it should contain clear targets and objectives and detailed action plans for their achievement. In order to build stronger institutional support and earn greater democratic legitimacy for the ESS, the revision process should involve proper oversight by the European Parliament and national parliaments. This would also enable civil society organizations to provide inputs. 2008 should be the year in which the first of these quinquennial reviews is undertaken.

Dr Stephen Pullinger, Executive Director, ISIS Europe



international security information service, europe

Rue Archimède 50, 1000 Brussels Tel: +32 (0)2 230 7446 Fax: +32 (0)2 230 6113
E-mail: info@isis-europe.org Internet: www.isis-europe.org

¹⁰ Dietmar Nickel and Gerrard Quille, ‘In the shadow of the constitution: CFSP/ESDP adapting to a changing external environment’, *Jean Monnet Working Paper 02/07*, New York University School of Law, 2007, p.31.

¹¹ Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke was a German General Field Marshall and chief of staff of the Prussian Army for thirty years. He is widely regarded as one of the great strategists of the latter half of the 1800s.