

Defining and securing the EU's strategic defence interests

Franco Algieri and Thomas Bauer

Executive summary:

The development of a common European security and defence policy has entered a crucial stage. The Convention has presented proposals concerning the strengthening of CFSP and ESDP and almost simultaneously Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg have started a new security and defence policy initiative. Altogether these activities express a desire inside Europe for a honed profile as a comprehensive actor in security policy. This will have a lasting effect on the European integration process and transatlantic relations.

In order to enhance Greater Europe's capacity to act efficiently in the fields of foreign, security and defence policy a reform has to meet the following requirements:

- Definition of the EU's common interests and values which need to be preserved and expanded. Commissioning of a European Grand Strategy Group (EGSG) in order to define these interests.
- Applying enhanced co-operation in ESDP in order to reduce the danger of non-action in the enlarged EU.
- Establishment of a formal Council of Defence Ministers.
- Inclusion of both a solidarity clause and a collective defence clause into the Treaty framework in order to deal with conventional and non-conventional threats.
- Strengthening Europe's political influence by linking NATO's Defence Capability Initiative and the European Capability Initiative in order to produce not national but European capabilities.
- Establishment of a European Agency for procurement, armament technology and strategic research.
- Deletion of Article 296 of the EC-Treaty.
- Establishment of a European Military Sales Strategy.
- Establishment of a European defence and R&D budget.
- Implementation of a strategic evaluation group and a military warfare group in a reshaped EU Institute for Security Studies for improving the Union's analytical capabilities.

Europe is closing in on a common foreign and security policy. The experiences of the Iraq conflict, the challenges related to a changing international order and the necessity to put in place further measures to combat transnational terrorism clearly indicate that Europe has to develop its distinctiveness as an independent global shaping power.

The danger of duplicative developments concerning this objective must clearly be taken into account with respect to the recent Four-Nation-Initiative (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg) for a European Defence Union. Strengthening ESDP must preferably take place on an EU level. However, a “Schengen-approach” regarding the build-up of a European Defence Union outside the EU may well be a solution for short-term demands. But without the United Kingdom joining in, and without preventing Europe from building up duplicative defence structures, the implementation of a European foreign, security and defence policy worth the name, enabling the EU to become a reliable and influential strategic actor, is on hold. A European Defence Union, founded on the idea of going ahead with a small group rather than waiting for small steps by the whole Union, must therefore be open for all EU member states to join.

Crisis? What crisis?

The re-emergence of war as a constant characteristic of international politics shows how external developments increasingly put pressure on the Union as a foreign and security political actor. The Iraq crisis highlighted the present dividing lines between the foreign policy interests of European governments and left a significant impact on transatlantic relations. But instead of jumping to the conclusion that CFSP has become insignificant, an enlarged EU rather has to take over greater responsibilities. Operation Concordia in Macedonia is a first important step towards the establishment of the EU as a capable military power – an even bigger operation in Bosnia can become reality next year.

Clarifying basic preconditions

Aiming at becoming a comprehensive global shaping power, the EU needs a strategic vision and common definition of interests that go beyond the general objectives of CFSP expressed in Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union. The Union should not just be able to guarantee the integrity of its territory and the security of its citizens, but also to solve crises anywhere in the world by means of non-military instruments – and if necessary also with military ones. Politicians, institutions and the public have realised the necessity to define security in a comprehensive sense. Consequently, the making of EU foreign and defence policy needs coherence in and between policy fields. In line with the attempt to abolish the pillar structure of the Treaty, qualified majority voting should be extended to all non-military CFSP matters.

The Nice Treaty is of very limited use for building up a common defence policy. A common doctrine concerning the strategic goals of CFSP is still missing. At the same time member states seem to be rather reluctant to support an integration process which would lead to the loss of sensitive sovereignty rights, namely the control over national armed forces and the domestic defence industry. In order to overcome this dilemma, the EU has to define the common interests and values it wants to preserve and expand. A European Grand Strategy Group (EGSG) has to be commissioned, which will have to define these interests.

Applying enhanced co-operation in ESDP offers a tool to reduce the danger of non-action in the enlarged EU. This intra-EU procedure offers flexibility and can become a key instrument for achieving progress in the framework of an EU-25. It will also help to avoid an uncontrolled spreading of ad hoc coalitions outside the treaty framework. All member states should agree that some may advance further in their cooperation, however not in an exclusionary way leading to the establishment of a closed core. Enhanced co-operation should rather be understood as a platform with plug-in ports for all member states.

Sharpening roles and tasks

Developing an EU with global shaping power makes it necessary to clarify the role of actors, institutions and procedures. The general decision to start a military operation should be left to the European Council. A European Foreign Minister and a strengthened Political and Security Committee should be the central actors in implementing and controlling ESDP action. The creation of a European Defence Minister seems not necessary, but a formal Council of Defence Ministers should be the rule. In the course of reshaping the role of and relations between old and new actors, the EU should avoid falling into a complexity trap. Clearly recognisable structures are needed and third partners of the EU have to know whom to address. This means that power should not be diffused on too many shoulders.

The widening of the scope of Petersberg Tasks seems useful. A different number of member states can participate at the same time in Petersberg Tasks on different levels, e.g. while a larger number of member states are active on lower-level tasks, a smaller number of states can be active in high-level operations. Nevertheless, clear assignments are important to avoid grey areas and uncertainty (e.g. how to define the means to combat terrorism).

Both, a solidarity clause and a collective defence clause should be included in the Treaty framework. The former would serve for non-conventional threats like terrorism or natural disasters whereas the latter would clearly refer to traditional military threats. It has to be acknowledged, however, that the new asymmetric security challenges can make a clear-cut distinction between non-conventional and military means difficult in certain cases.

This Union should be embedded in a reinforced UN system and gain a double parliamentary legitimacy on the European and national level. Although the debate about a European Security Council leaves many questions open to further discussion, it should not be totally rejected and needs deeper consideration.

Linking the capability debate with EU-NATO relations

In order to remove capacity and capability deficits of the EU, the European Capability Initiative was launched in July 1999 - following the NATO Defence Capability Initiative of April the same year. Both initiatives resulted in a 70% overlap of common deficits. The main deficits concern Theatre Air Defence, unmanned aerial vehicles, C⁴ISTAR capacities (Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target acquisition), strategic air- and sealift, and nuclear, biological and chemical protection and detection devices.

An analysis based on capabilities seems to be the best way of connecting EU and NATO assets in the near future, enabling both European Rapid Reaction Forces (ERRF) and NATO Response Forces (NRF) to carry out joint operations on a global scale. Therefore the two capability initiatives should be tied together. By strengthening the European part of NATO, the political influence of Brussels in Washington will be increased. Washington currently requests European capabilities for their purposes on a bilateral approach. By constructing not national but European capabilities, the EU will gain a more relevant position with regard to US power policy. The EU-NATO Berlin-plus arrangements are a big step ahead towards this co-operation, enabling the EU to use NATO operational planning and command assets for EU-led operations, e.g. in Macedonia. By further developing this co-operative approach regarding force structuring, force planning and force generation, the danger of a duplicative security and defence build-up will be under control.

EU defence policy instruments

For the build-up of specific capabilities, the EU member states and the EU itself need to enhance co-operation. Currently, the EU is lacking instruments to effectively tackle issues of defence policy or the defence industry. At the same time, the EU Commission has become aware of the economic and political value of the resources of a European defence industry. If the EU wants to achieve the status of an independent global shaping power, it must be able to rely on its own and independent defence industry resources. Europe has to be master of its own tools of crisis management.

In order to establish this basis, the EU Commission has developed a more important profile in defence matters. Following the proposal of the Convention's working group on defence, which addressed the need for multinational co-operation, the EU Commission has proposed the construction of a supranational European Agency dealing with

issues of armament and technological research. The task of this Agency will be the co-ordination of investment and research efforts, as well as the organisation of joint procurement decisions, currently organised in the two divergent Organisations of the Western European Armament Group (WEAG) and the Organisation conjointe de coopération en matière d'armement (OCCAR).

In addition, the EU will have to rethink Article 296 of the EC-Treaty, which protects national defence policy against intervention of the EU Commission. The EU must be willing and able to protect European defence companies from being bought up by US-led defence consortia. On the same level, the EU Commission has to define a Foreign Military Trade Strategy in order to support European companies, especially regarding the offset contracts - a part of the military sales business, which has to a certain degree become even more important than the weapon system itself. Offset contracts consist of additional foreign economic and financial investment for the purchasing state. U.S. companies are able to offer a much wider range of offset solutions due to the fact that the federal government in Washington supports their deals on an official governmental level. European competitors lack such possibilities. The value of such contracts offered by the United States is too high for single European member states to compete with.

The pooling of national capacities in order to gain European capabilities can only be seen as an interim solution. By pooling financial capacities, the EU will be able to develop European capabilities, which in the end will lead to the creation of European armed forces. In order to safeguard this development, the EU needs to secure the independence of its technological resources. Regarding the financial dilemma of many EU member states, the aspect of financing this European defence policy ought to be taken up by the EU Commission as well. Therefore the EU should establish a European defence budget which should be used for European R&T (research and technological development) capacities.

Improving analytical capabilities

The future role of the EU Institute for Security Studies should be redefined. A group of military and armaments technology experts should provide analysis and scenarios for future warfare and defence technology developments, which can then be addressed by the European armaments agency. For this purpose, it is indispensable to develop a far-reaching pooling of strategic analyses. The vulnerability of open and highly interdependent systems like the amalgamation of European states is sufficiently well known. As threat perceptions differ not only between the EU and the US but also inside the EU, it seems necessary to bring the specific knowledge together in a strategic evaluation group, consisting of representatives of existing institutions dealing with security studies. This group should compare and evaluate the corresponding information and data (e.g. from the Commission, Council, EP, EU Institute for Security Studies, European think tanks etc.) and publish an EU strategic report regularly.

Conclusions

The EU as a comprehensive security actor that is able to shape security globally should not be understood as a counterbalance to the US, but rather as a self-assured and capable international actor, with genuine capabilities of its own. The issue at stake is not about copying but complementing the US in a constructive strategic partnership, offering an alternative to a unipolar approach in international relations.