Europe's Need for a New Global Strategy

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Resumo

O Imperativo Europeu de uma Nova Estratégia Global

No decurso de 2013 Estados-membros, analistas e decisores consideraram que o Conselho Europeu de dezembro passado deveria apelar à reflexão conjunta sobre a avaliação do ambiente global e o impacto dos desafios futuros reclamando a formulação de uma nova estratégia global. A redistribuição do poder global com o desvio dos EUA para a Ásia, o falhanço das intervenções no grande Médio Oriente e a crise financeira levaram a uma retração da Europa. Do mesmo modo, a vizinhança próxima da UE empobrecida e instável perdeu capacidade para lidar com a reemergência do mundo Vestefaliano. O recurso ao *soft power* e à ajuda financeira afiguram-se como pouco eficazes perante parceiros internacionais não socializados com práticas de responsabilidade cosmopolita. No entanto, a propensão da UE para o consenso, compromisso e capacidade para definir a agenda internacional poderá adequar-se bem à transição do mundo hegemónico a uma nova distribuição de poderes, valores e interesses. Isto implicará uma nova forma de pensar estrategicamente o mundo, uma nova forma de projetar valores e repensar o papel das forças armadas.

Abstract

During 2013 member states, analysts and decision makers considered that December's European Council should give the incentive to a common evaluation, regarding the global environment and the impact of future challenges claiming the formulation of a new global strategy. The new global power distribution, with the American shift to Asia, the failure of recent interventions in the wider Middle East and the financial crisis, led Europe to inwardness. In Europe's impoverish and unstable closer neighborhood, the EU lost the ability to deal with the re-emergent Westphalian world. The use of soft power and economical aid are of little effectiveness towards international partners poorly socialized with the practice of cosmopolitan responsibility. Nevertheless, the European tendency to draw on consensus, compromise and ability to set the international agenda seem to adapt well to the transition to new hegemonies and power distribution. This will involve a new form of thinking the world strategically and to find ways to project values and reassess the future role of the armed forces.

In December 2013 the national leaders of the EU member states, meeting as the European Council, held their first collective discussion on defence since the 2008 French Presidency. Their decisions on the Common Security and Defence Policy included the following, addressed to Catherine Ashton's as-yet-unidentified successor: "The European Council invites the High Representative, in close cooperation with the Commission, to assess the impact of changes in the global environment, and to report to the Council in the course of 2015 on the challenges and opportunities arising for the Union, following consultations with the Member States." (European Council, 2013).

A number of EU member states, led by Sweden and Poland and backed by a chorus of Parliamentarians, commentators and think-tankers, had pushed for this outcome, urging the case for the EU to formulate a new global strategy. In the event, the word 'strategy' is absent from the mandate. But this is probably a good thing: it will allow unproductive questions such as how a new strategy should relate to the 2003 European Security Strategy - ESS (Council of the European Union, 2003), or the scope and weight of any final document, to be side-stepped. For what matters is the process, not the product: and what the European Council have done is open the door to a long overdue strategic reflection in Europe – a stocktake of where the world is headed, and of how Europeans must operate if they want to continue to be able to protect their interests and values.

For the mandate rightly makes assessment of global change the starting-point. The last decade has seen an unprecedented redistribution of global power, with the end of the post-Cold War Western hegemony and the arrival centre-stage of the 'emerging powers'. The US has responded with its 'pivot to Asia'. The failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have discredited liberal interventionism. The EU, pre-occupied with its own doubling in size from 15 to 28 member states, and then coping with its biggest economic crisis, has withdrawn into its shell.

Nor is the pace of change likely to slow. "Global Trends 2030", a publication of the US National Intelligence Council, contains a fascinating range of data and predictions.[1] Similar future-gazing has been undertaken amongst the Brussels institutions.[2] On current projections, China will by 2030 have overtaken the US as the world's biggest economy – and may well have a bigger defence budget. China and India combined will have a greater economic weight than the G7. South-South trade will be approaching North-North. The global population will be around 8.5 billion, with most of the continuing growth concentrated in Africa. 5 billion people will have access to mobile data – the global 'middle class' will be equally numerous,

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1   Available at http://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/national-intelligence-council-global-trends

2   See http://europa.eu/espas/

and extreme poverty will have been largely eliminated. But demand for water, food and energy will have risen between 35 and 50%. As for the EU, its share of global GDP will have fallen from 28% to 18 or 17%; it will be importing 65% of its energy needs; and its aging population will account for only 6 out of every 100 people on the planet. European advantages in education and technology will be reducing. On all the conventional measures, Europe faces continuing relative decline.

The challenges thus implied are not hard to see. A resource-poor continent with expensive tastes (the cherished social model) and a shrinking, aging population will find it increasingly tough to earn its living. The Union is further handicapped by poor 'team morale' – a loss of confidence and mutual solidarity, and a cacophony of different views on both external policies and economics. Nor does it help to be adjacent to neighbours – Russia, the Middle East and North Africa – who are amongst those on the planet coping least well with globalisation. And, where the norms of the liberal international order that Europeans espouse were fifteen years ago unchallenged, authoritarian capitalism and a 'neo-Westphalian' approach to international relations is today gaining ground.

Perhaps, though, the biggest challenge is European complacency - a reluctance to take any of this on board. In a recent policy brief (Dennison, 2013), the European Council on Foreign Relations identified the key areas where Europeans urgently need to wake up and re-assess their comfortable but out-dated assumptions about handling the rest of the world. Recent events in Europe's neighbourhood have – or should have – exploded the belief that Europe can rely on soft power and deep pockets to influence those around it; whilst developments at the UN and WTO should equally have brought home the realisation that the new powers are simply not going to be 'socialised' into becoming 'responsible stakeholders' in a Western-designed international order. So future 'multilateralism' will have to involve engaging with an altogether more complex and fluid set of (often regional) institutions and ad hoc coalitions than has been the EU's traditional focus.

Other sea-changes with which Europe needs to get to grips include the US strategic reorientation and what it means for the transatlantic relationship; the growing security risks in Asia (an area Europeans still treat exclusively as a market and hoped-for source of investment); the souring of the Arab Spring; and the retreat of liberal interventionism at a time when, beyond the confines of our relatively safe continent, armed force seems to be reasserting itself in international affairs.

All this said, the necessary strategic stocktake should not reveal a wholly negative balance. Our lead may be slipping, but the EU can still draw on huge human and technological capital. For some years yet, our global market share should remain commanding; and even as others close in and overtake us, we should retain particular 'long suits' – in finance, professional services and administration, in aerospace and other high-end manufacturing, in our armed forces. Europe's herbivo-

rous image may invite bullying – but has its advantages too. And the endemic EU skills of compromise, coalition-building, and agenda-setting seem well adapted to a world of diffused power – especially when reinforced by the continent's unique network of global connections. Even the diversity of our views and priorities could, if managed with discipline and self-restraint, be put to good use.

So the prospect of decline is mitigated by the assets and opportunity for some years yet to influence the organisation and behaviour of the evolving wider world – to shape the transition from Western hegemony to a more distributed power structure in ways that suit our values and interests. The challenge is to try to lock in our preferences whilst we still can. But to achieve this we will have to bring our assets to bear in an altogether more coherent and calculated fashion, starting with a fundamental rethink of all those regional policies -- towards our neighbourhood, Russia, the wider Middle East, China, and the rest of Asia -- which the last few years have exposed as self-deluding and ineffective.

At bottom what is needed is less an intellectual endeavour than a major attitudinal shift. Europe needs to shake off its introversion, and complacency. "It must wake up to the imperative of engaging with the outside world as more than a combination of merchant and Florence Nightingale" (Van Rompuy, 2014). It will need to recover the habit of strategic debate (whether on the implications of the US's strategic reorientation, or non-proliferation, or Asian security, or half a dozen other neglected issues with potential to bear directly on the prosperity and security of Europe's citizens); rethink how it can best propagate its values in a world where 'conditionality' no longer works; and revisit the role of its armed forces. Above all it must overcome its fastidiousness about the concept of power, and reassess what it comprises in the unfolding global environment; how and why Europeans might wish to exercise it; and what they stand to lose if they do not maximise it.

The main threats to Europe today are not so much security-related (certainly, terrorism and cyber-attack need taking seriously – but, as our publics perceive, we are probably safer today in Europe than at any time in previous history) but stemming from our own attitudes: a comfortable readiness to acquiesce in decline, aspiring in Zbigniew Brzezinski's phrase to become "the world's most comfortable retirement home" (Brzezinski, 1998); a reluctance to bear the costs and risks of armed force, masquerading as a principled pacifism; and a lack of solidarity reflecting the temptation in a number of capitals to believe they can still make it on their own.

In sum, whilst the necessary strategic stocktake must involve rethinking a number of outdated European policies, what is needed is less a new strategic recipe-book than a strategic repositioning. Europeans, particularly but not exclusively foreign and security policy elites need to absorb the reality of living in a declining region to which the world does not owe a living, and must therefore work harder to protect its interests and promote, not impose its values. The key is for Europeans to accept

the necessity to become more active, more capable and more coherent in how they address the world around them. This, of course, is exactly the conclusion of the 2003 Security Strategy. So what is needed is not to replace that document, but to re-interpret its core principles for a transformed international environment – and then apply them.

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