

20 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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European leaders handed HR/VP Federica Mogherini an impossible mission last June when they asked her to come up with an EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS). While Mogherini's advisors prepare the EUGS, most of the threats predicted by Javier Solana's 2003 security strategy are hitting the EU hard: terrorism, organised crime, state failure, and regional conflict. The refugee crisis is one of the results, with its disruptive effects and human suffering. In diverting energies into a new theoretical exercise, the EU risks fiddling while Rome burns.

Mission impossible

There is unlikely, ever, to be a global strategy involving 28 member states except on paper. European states are too diverse to implement a common strategy. Spain will always be more concerned about Morocco than about Ukraine; Poland will always worry about the eastern neighbourhood and remain unmoved by the troubles of North Africa. Germany and Italy seek dialogue with Russia, when conditions permit; central European states emphasise deterrence.

France and Britain meanwhile are ready to use force in defence of national interests; Germany deplores military force for understandable historical reasons. France faces terrorist threats but is scarcely affected by the refugee influx. Compromise language and coalitions of the willing cannot paper over tangible divisions of interests.

The larger member states are simply not willing to delegate responsibility for issues touching on war, peace and vital national interests to the EU. They routinely exclude high-ranking EU representatives from sensitive foreign policy discussions, such as the contact group on Ukraine. The German chancellor, the Italian prime minister and their colleagues decide on the imposition and renewal of sanctions, EU institutions execute their decisions. It was Chancellor Angela Merkel who dashed to Istanbul in October 2015 to persuade the Turkish president to limit the flow of asylum seekers, leaving Brussels struggling to implement the ensuing 'action plan'.

Territorial defence – the core of hard security – remains the preserve of the member states and of

NATO. The role of the EU in hard security is negligible, despite a plethora of procedures, agencies, situation rooms, and EU flags flying over largely national policing operations. The EU has a limited track record in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. The previous HR/VP claimed credit for a partial breakthrough between Serbia and Kosovo; but it was really the incentive of EU membership that brought them together and even this is now fraying.

EU and NATO enlargement helped to transform the lives of more than 100 million Europeans. But Jean-Claude Juncker, the Commission president, has said there will be no further enlargement on his watch, thereby removing the EU's most effective foreign policy tool. The European Neighbourhood Policy, often derided as enlargement-lite, provides few incentives and has failed to instil a commitment to pro-democracy reforms in Europe's eastern neighbourhood, North Africa and the Middle East.

The notion of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is a relic of the triumphalism that accompanied the collapse of communism and the end of the cold war. At the time, European leaders saw it as a route towards political union, with the EU taking over the traditional attributes of sovereign states. Today, faced with recession, the rise of populism, and a troubled neighbourhood, European politicians compete to prove that they are the most ardent defenders of national interests.

Playing to Europe's strengths

That said, the 'return of *realpolitik*' does not condemn Europe to impotence. The EU remains a force to be reckoned with in international relations. The EU's strength comes from the outward

projection of the policy areas where it has acquired authority internally. The EU can achieve more in its relations with Russia, for example, through the judicious application of anti-trust policy than it can through political posturing.

Moreover, if European leaders were ready to spend political capital on mobilising support for the proposed trade and investment partnership with the US, they could breathe new life into the transatlantic partnership. The US would then have to get its own act together, once the presidential elections are over.

The EU would gain respect and influence in the world if it gave top priority to Europe's role in the technological revolution. Funding for this needs to be maintained and not diverted into stop-gap crisis measures. EU-sponsored advances in science, research, innovation and their application to business could do much to restore Europe's global leadership.

Such initiatives would improve peoples' lives, counter the prevailing sense of European decline, and do more to strengthen peace and prosperity than any number of grand strategies.



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