

EU GLOBAL STRATEGY: EUROPE HOLDS SOME TRUMP CARDS YET

On 28 June 2016, High Representative Federica Mogherini presented the *Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (EUGS) to the European Council. Many pundits described the decision to table an external strategy just a few days after the UK created a huge internal challenge by voting for Brexit as another proof that Brussels was out of touch. But would it have demonstrated a better sense of reality to pretend that because of the British decision to put a stop to its EU membership, the world around Europe will come to a stop as well? The EU needs the EUGS and that “is even more true after the British referendum,” as Mogherini rightly said in the foreword, and, one might add, after the inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States. Does the new strategy give us something to work with to render EU foreign and security policy more effective?

REALPOLITIK WITH EUROPEAN CHARACTERISTICS

First of all, the EUGS introduces a new overall approach to foreign and security policy, which can be read as an improvement on the 2003 *European Security Strategy* (ESS) that preceded it. “The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states,” we said in 2003. Unfortunately, spreading good governance and democracy proved more difficult than expected, and when their absence provoked crises, we did not always muster the will and the means to respond. Where the ESS proved to be overoptimistic (optimism is after all a moral duty, as Karl Popper said), the EUGS is more conscious of the limits imposed by our own capabilities and by others’ intractability, and therefore more modest. It charts a course between isolationism and interventionism, between “dreamy idealism and unprincipled pragmatism,” as I put in a 2014 policy brief,¹ under the new heading of what the EUGS now calls “principled pragmatism”.

This represents a return to Realpolitik. Not Realpolitik as it has come to be understood, as the end justifying the means, but Realpolitik in the original sense of the term. As John Bew usefully reminds us, Realpolitik as coined by the German liberal Ludwig von Rochau in 1853 meant the rejection of liberal *utopianism*, but not of liberal *ideals* themselves. Rather, “it held out a vision of the future and a guide

¹ S. Biscop, *EU Foreign Policy Between the Revolution and the Status Quo*, Policy Brief No. 9, Institute for European Studies, Brussels 2014, http://www.ies.be/files/2014_9_PB.pdf.

for how to get there,” for how to achieve those ideals in a realistic way.² Or, as the EUGS has it, “responsible engagement can bring about positive change”. This, says Bew, is the “real Realpolitik”; given that other actors still pursue the Machiavellian version, let’s call it Realpolitik with European characteristics.

The fact that for the first time ever an EU document lists our vital interests (which is a breakthrough in its own right) is a reflection of this new approach. Policy is about interests; if it isn’t, no one will invest in it. That applies to the EU as much as to a state, and: “There is no clash between national and European interests.” The vital interests that the EUGS defines are important to all Member States: the security of EU citizens and territory; prosperity (which, the EUGS states, implies equality – otherwise we would indeed not be talking about the prosperity of *all* citizens); democracy; and a rules-based global order to contain power politics. If we set these interests off against the analysis of the global environment that Mogherini presented to the European Council in June 2015,³ we can see that the EUGS identifies five priorities: (1) the security of the EU itself; (2) the neighbourhood; (3) ways to deal with war and crisis; (4) stable regional orders across the globe; and (5) effective global governance.

PRIORITIES FOR “PRINCIPLED PRAGMATISM”

The way to pursue the first three priorities especially clearly reflects the modesty or realism imposed by “principled pragmatism”, by emphasizing our own security, the neighbourhood, and hard power, and by no longer emphasizing democratization.

First, there is a strong focus on Europe’s own security (which was much less present in the ESS) and on the neighbourhood: “We will take responsibility foremost in Europe and its surrounding regions, while pursuing targeted engagement further afield.” Following the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, and the refugee crisis that is visible across Europe, addressing our internal and border security was indispensable if the EUGS wanted to be credible with citizens and Member States alike. The focus on the neighbourhood is justified by the range of our capabilities. It is defined very broadly though, going beyond what Brussels now often calls the “neighbours of the neighbours”: “to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa”. Stabilizing this part of the world is no mean task, yet the EUGS achieves the right balance, for it does not ignore the challenges in Asia (“There is a direct connection between European prosperity and Asian security”) and at the global level (such as the freedom of the global commons).

Second, there is much less emphasis on democracy. In line with the November 2015 Joint Communication on the future of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (though the EUGS looks at a broader region),⁴ democratization no longer

² J. Bew, *Realpolitik. A History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, p. 28.

³ F. Mogherini, *The European Union in a Changing Global Environment. A More Connected, Contested and Complex World*, EEAS, Brussels 2015.

⁴ European Commission & High Representative, *Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Joint Communication JOIN (2015) 50 final. Brussels, EU, 2015.

is a compulsory part of the package. The EU will support democracies where they emerge, for “their success [...] would reverberate across their respective regions” – but in our broad neighbourhood it only mentions Tunisia and Georgia as positive examples. As many others do not wish closer relations with the EU, the EUGS focuses on reducing the fragility of these states rather than on changing their regimes, for which we have but limited leverage. But since many of our neighbours are “repressive states [that] are inherently fragile in the long term,” targeting civil society should be emphasized instead. The aim is to increase the resilience of people and societies, especially by fighting poverty and inequality, so that over time home-grown positive change can emerge. Just like in the Joint Communication, it is not entirely clear where the funds for this will come from.

These less ambitious goals concerning democratization are simply the sign that the EU has accepted reality. It is all about being honest with ourselves. The EU cannot democratize Egypt, so it should not pretend to. At the same time, it should not feel obliged to pretend that the Al-Sisi regime is a great friend – it is not. But we maintain diplomatic relations with (nearly) everybody, not just with our friends, and we work with (nearly) everybody where interests coincide. As long as they are there, we can indeed be *obliged* to work with authoritarian regimes in order to address urgent problems; the anti-IS coalition is a case in point. The EUGS does not say much about this dimension: how to work with such regimes, in line with “principled pragmatism”, without further strengthening their hold on power?

This question demonstrates that resilience is a tricky concept to be used in this context. Increasing the resilience of a state against external threats can easily lead to increasing the resilience of a repressive regime. While we have to be realistic about our ability to change regimes, we should not be propping them up either. It makes sense therefore for the EUGS to simultaneously advocate capacity-building and the reform of the justice, security and defence sectors, as well as human rights protection. The strong emphasis on human rights (which is indeed to be distinguished from democratization) is indispensable, for it is often against their own governments that people have to be resilient. But can we deliver on that promise? Perhaps fighting inequalities would have been a better heading for the new strategy towards our eastern and southern neighbours than resilience (the meaning of which is not really clarified by the introduction of “energy and environmental resilience”).

What is more, if the EU wants to be more honest with itself, then (the Balkans excepted) “a credible enlargement policy” does not really have a place in the section on neighbourhood, for enlargement no longer is a credible project, least of all for Turkey.

Third, there is a much stronger awareness that a credible military instrument is indispensable. “Soft and hard power go hand in hand,” Mogherini rightly says in the foreword. The EUGS has not rediscovered geopolitics per se – the ESS already stated that “even in an era of globalisation, geography is still important” – but it recognizes more than the ESS that some powers do not hesitate to use blackmail and force in what they consider to be geopolitical competition. Hence the ambition “to protect Europe, respond to external crises, and assist in developing our partners’ security

and defence capacities.” Furthermore, our efforts “should enable the EU to act autonomously while also contributing to and undertaking actions in cooperation with NATO.” This can be read as the EU constituting the European pillar that allows its Member States to act with the US where possible and without US assets when necessary (which could actually also be through NATO, the UN or an ad hoc coalition as well as the EU itself).

The ends to which the EU should apply this “strategic autonomy” (as Mogherini calls it in the foreword) are mentioned throughout the text. First, “this means living up to our commitments to mutual assistance and solidarity,” i.e. Articles 42.7 TEU and 222 TFEU. Second, where conflict is ongoing, the EU should “protect human lives, notably civilians” and “be ready to support and help consolidate local cease-fires”, presumably in the broad neighbourhood as a matter of priority. This is an ambitious undertaking, for it entails deploying troops on the ground, with serious firepower, who are backed up by substantial air support and ready reserves, and who do not necessarily seek out and destroy an opponent but who will fight when the civilians for whom they are responsible are threatened. Third, the EU “is seeking to make greater practical contributions to Asian security,” including in the maritime area. Finally, the EU “could assist further and complement UN peacekeeping” as a demonstration of its belief in the UN as “the bedrock of the multilateral rules-based order”.

Of the remaining two priorities, the focus on “cooperative regional orders” also reflects the awareness of ongoing geopolitical competition between different global and regional powers. The intention to ensure a coherent response to China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative, not just through the EU-China Connectivity Platform (to create the link with the EU’s own investment plans) but through ASEM and the EU–ASEAN partnership as well, could signal the start of a sophisticated diplomatic initiative. In the same vein, the aim to deepen dialogue with Iran and the GCC countries ought to be the beginning of a new vision of a future regional order in the Middle East, though the EUGS itself could have offered more guidance already. After all, there is not one but several wars ongoing in an area that clearly falls within the neighbourhood in which the EU ought to assume responsibility. This will also be one of the issues (though it is not among the examples explicitly listed in the EUGS) on which the EU will have to cooperate with Russia, while making “substantial changes in relations” dependent on Russia’s respect for international law. As far as Russia is concerned, the EUGS basically advocates strategic patience.

The fifth priority puts global governance firmly back on the EU agenda, after “effective multilateralism” (as the ESS phrased it) more or less disappeared from the radar screen. Now the EUGS ambitiously sets out “to transform rather than simply preserve the existing system,” which will indeed be necessary to prevent “the emerging of alternative groupings to the detriment of all”. Under this heading as well, an ambitious programme on free trade (envisaging FTAs with the US, Japan, Mercosur, India, ASEAN, and others) and on the freedom of the global commons could herald a creative diplomatic initiative – and a more strategic use of EU trade policy.

Of course, the EUGS does also show some deficiencies. The most eye-catching is the curious lack of diplomatic ambition when it comes to dealing with conflicts

and crises, the third priority. In contrast with the ambitious (though perhaps not fully realized) military plans to protect civilians, the EUGS appears rather reactive on the diplomatic front. When peace agreements are reached, the EU will support them and provide security, but when they are not, the EUGS seems to prioritize the local level. To take the case of Syria: brokering local ceasefires will save people (if they are guaranteed militarily), but ultimately only diplomatic success in Geneva will end the war. The EU is actually good at diplomacy, and the EUGS refers at several instances to the successful example of the Iran nuclear negotiations, so it could have been more ambitious in this area.

Indeed, after Trump's election for president, the EU will have to be more ambitious overall.

HAS TRUMP RESHUFFLED THE CARDS?

"I think NATO may be obsolete." When Trump spoke these words during the campaign, he most likely had only a vague idea of how he would act upon them. But one thing is certain: if he made the statement, it is because he knew it to be a vote-winner. And win he did, which means that his view is more than just a marginal opinion. Support for European security is much less automatic than it once was, and the view that Americans are doing too much and Europeans too little is widespread. It is an opinion underpinned by academic argument. In his 2014 book *Restraint – A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy*, MIT professor Barry Posen proposed to greatly reduce American involvement in order to force its European and Asian allies to stand on their own feet. He even wanted Germany and Japan to acquire nuclear weapons. In his view, NATO ought to be replaced with a more limited arrangement between the US and the EU, which should organize its own defence.

The Alliance will not be dissolved as quickly as all that. But the criticism of Europe is far from unjustified. Take the US out of NATO, and the collective defence guarantee (Article 5) looks a lot less credible – if at all. That is why the doubt that Trump's statements about NATO have induced is so dangerous. Not that Russia is gearing up to invade the Baltic states – that would still force all Allies, including the US, to declare their military support unambiguously and immediately. Putin is smarter than that. He has an interest in exploiting the vacuum that Trump's ambiguity has created, under cover of which he can pursue more assertive policies in the countries wedged in between the EU/NATO and Russia.

If Europeans want their defence to be less dependent on the vagaries of US domestic politics, they need to acquire the means to achieve strategic autonomy: the ability to undertake not all, but certain military tasks alone. The EUGS puts forward exactly this objective. The way to reach it is not necessarily for Europe as a whole to spend a lot more on defence but, first, to ensure that every EU and NATO member pays its due: the EU average of 1.5% of GDP spent on defence is a real and realistic target.

Second, Europeans must use EU institutions and incentives fully to make the leap from defence cooperation to defence integration. Instead of just making their forces interoperable with each other, they should do defence planning as if they had a sin-

gle force made up of national combat units anchored in multinational corps structures with multinational command, logistics, maintenance, and training. The corollary is that all European states who join in such a scheme (hopefully at least a dozen or so) should then also do away with all structures and units that are, in effect, useless and therefore do not deserve to be called capabilities at all – and there are many. This would free up budgetary space to invest in the strategic enablers which until now the US has to provide for nearly every European operation.

All of this would allow Europeans to do two things: to convince the US to support NATO by stepping up their own contribution to collective defence, and to project power in their own broad neighbourhood (under the EU or the NATO flag), where the Obama administration already made it clear the US will no longer always come and solve Europe's security problems. The more Europeans can take care of their own problems, the less risk they run of having to deal with American adventurism in that same neighbourhood, the consequences of which, as we know since the invasion in Iraq in 2003, can reverberate for decades. While Trump has condemned America's wars in the Middle East, he also seems to be yearning for a dramatic decisive strike against IS. And one can easily imagine him lashing out when an incident provokes him to act like he thinks a strong commander-in-chief should act. He certainly has announced his wish to increase US defence budget.

The preferred solution to security challenges in Europe's neighbourhood remains of course a diplomatic one. Europe, through the EU, is good at diplomacy. Witness the Iran nuclear deal, which would not have happened if the EU had not kept negotiations going during all those years when the US thought they could afford not to talk with Tehran. Witness also the Minsk agreement between Ukraine and Russia, brokered by Angela Merkel and François Hollande and backed up by EU sanctions and NATO deterrence.

Will President Trump withdraw US support in both these instances?

If Trump seeks to unravel the agreement with Iran, which may be a tempting symbolic act, it is highly unlikely that the EU will follow suit. Not only are European companies, which have been chafing at the bit, just re-entering the Iranian market. The normalization of relations with Iran is also the absolute precondition for any attempt to start dialogue between Iran and Saudi Arabia, in order to end their proxy war in Syria (and Yemen) and create a stable regional order in the Gulf. As much is said in the EUGS – but so far the EU plays a conspicuously small part in Middle East and Gulf diplomacy, even though the spill-over effects of the continuing war hit it much more than the US.

A huge additional European diplomatic effort is therefore necessary. It was anyway, regardless of the outcome of the US elections, but even more so now, also to prevent a potential negative fall-out of a prospective deal between Trump and Putin.

The Obama administration of course also tried to reach a deal, at least on Syria – that is why Foreign Ministers John Kerry and Sergei Lavrov met so many times. Had Hillary Clinton won, any deal on Syria would still be one that keeps Assad in place – Russia's military intervention made that inevitable months ago. Which is why Russia too now has an interest in ending the war: it has achieved its war aim,

which amounts to the preservation of the influence that it already had, and it cannot achieve more, as Assad cannot be defeated but also cannot win. Trump should not therefore fall for the temptation of paying too high a price: a Syrian deal at the cost of selling out in eastern Europe would not be the early demonstration of leadership that he undoubtedly seeks.

It is evident that the Crimea will not return to Ukraine. That has been tacitly recognized by everybody, as has the fact that EU or NATO membership for Ukraine is not on offer. Trump may well choose to render this explicit, which from the EU point of view might perhaps be acceptable as long as the core of the Minsk agreement is upheld: Moscow must restore the control of Ukraine's eastern borders to Kiev and end the flow of support to the separatist rebels. Europe's aim is not to entice its eastern neighbours into a close partnership, but to uphold their sovereignty to choose for themselves whom they want to be enticed by. And to support them if they choose the EU, as is the case in Ukraine.

A "success" in Syria and the satisfaction of being openly recognized as a great leader by someone who also imagines himself to be one may entice Putin to conclude a deal with Trump. But it is as likely that the two prima donnas will clash. Putin may well continue to see more advantages in maintaining a "frozen conflict" in eastern Ukraine, giving him a stick to beat Kiev and its allies with whenever he feels like it or his domestic popularity demands it. Doubts about Trump's commitment to NATO may likely increase Putin's greed instead of his will to compromise. And it is difficult to see how he can accept a deal on Syria that does not include his ally Iran. Trump will therefore have to choose between distancing himself from NATO and a deal with Putin, and between no deal with Iran or a deal on Syria. Nobody knows what his preference might be.

As if all of this did not create enough of a headache for Europe, there is also the fear of the consequences Trump's views on trade can have for security in Asia. If Trump effectively undoes the free trade agreement with America's Pacific partners (TPP) while simultaneously scaling up protectionist measures against China, he will create an economic and political vacuum and a China that is even more eager to fill it. More countries that traditionally keep an even distance between the US and China might then go the way of the Philippines, which has moved a lot closer to Beijing, while those who rely on a US security guarantee, like Japan, may start considering other options.

Meanwhile, the EU has just stated in the EUGS that it will accelerate free trade negotiations with its Asian partners. Those FTAs will acquire a lot more political and security importance than the EU probably imagined. Of course, the EU cannot and will not replace the US as the external security guarantor. But it can play a significant role in maintaining some political margin of manoeuvre for Asian countries wary of China's dominant position. There is a growing awareness in Brussels that the EU must become a political and a security actor as well as an economic player in Asia. For that aspiration to become reality, however, European diplomacy will have to become a lot more purposeful and united. Just this year, a divided EU managed only "to acknowledge" the verdict in the arbitration procedure between the Philippines and

China on the South China Sea, in spite of its self-professed image as the champion of international law and multilateral institutions. Europe's Asian partners were decidedly underwhelmed by this lukewarm statement on the security issue in Asia today.



The election of Donald Trump has reshuffled the cards for Europe. Whether activist or isolationist, his policies will affect European interests – and probably not for the better, judging by his pronouncements so far. Does it necessarily mean that the cards are stacked against Europe? No, but the EU definitely has to up its game and show a lot more resolution and unity.

The prospect of Brexit has of course rendered that even more difficult than it already was. European leaders have to realize that they cannot afford to let Brexit distract them from the huge foreign policy challenges facing them. Clearly, even if and when the UK effectively leaves the EU, the remaining 27 will have a great interest in continuing to involve it in foreign policy-making. However, the UK will have to accept that if it wants a “special relationship” with the EU in foreign and security policy, as its foreign policy establishment has begun to frame it, it will have to ask for it, and put an offer on the table. One cannot slam the door and expect to be asked to return. Or do British leaders really think the special relationship with the US led by Trump will suffice to defend British interests?

Europe: up your game, or *rien ne va plus*.

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The article discusses the *Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (EUGS), presented by High Representative Federica Mogherini before the European Council on 28 June 2016. The author ponders the impact Trump's presidency and Brexit could have on the implementation of the strategy and on EU-NATO relations in particular.

Keywords: European Union, Mogherini, NATO, Brexit, Trump