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iCES and Senior European Experts Seminar:
Keeping Europe Safe

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Introduction

The EU's new global security strategy, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe,* was published in late June 2016.[1] Over a year in preparation, *Shared Vision* replaces the previous strategy which had been adopted in very different circumstances in 2003. Although the EU has only modest military capability (22 of its 28 Member States are also members of NATO and see their territorial defence as secured through NATO rather than the EU), it has considerable capacity to influence events on the continent and in its neighbourhood because of its economic power, its significance in world trade, its collective weight in global affairs and its development aid. But the EU's potential influence has rarely been fully realised and the deterioration in its regional security of the last decade, with the risk of further dangers to come, is alarming and requires a response.

Security issues are becoming more important and the strategy is likely to be discussed at the December 2016 European Council (i.e. while the UK is still an EU member) when decisions could be taken.

In this background paper, prepared for a seminar at Regent's University London in November 2016, we examine the background to the new EU security strategy, explain the main elements of the strategy and conduct an early assessment of its potential to improve the EU's security in years to come. The implications of the UK's vote to leave the EU for security policy are also discussed.

Background

Over the past 13 years the security situation in Europe and its neighbourhood has deteriorated sharply. To the east, Russia has illegally annexed Crimea and it continues to support the on-going insurgency in Eastern Ukraine; the Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008 ended with Russian troops remaining in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (both parts of Georgia); other 'frozen conflicts', such as in Moldova and Azerbaijan, remain dangerously unresolved. Russia's resurgence has alarmed the Eastern and Central European members of the EU (most of whom are also members of NATO) and led to tough EU (and US) sanctions against Russia, as well as NATO military measures, such as the deployment of forces in Estonia and Poland.

To the south, the Middle East and North Africa have changed out of all recognition since 2003. The aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq and the later Arab Spring has been chaotic and dangerous. So-called Islamic State (Daesh) controls substantial areas of Iraq and Syria (although its area of control was reduced in 2015-16); and also parts of Libya around Sirte. The Iraqi government is sectarian and unstable. The Syrian civil war has been protracted, bloody and its repercussions have rippled across the region. The Israel-Palestine dispute remains unresolved and the opportunity to create a two-state solution appears to have receded. The overthrow of the Gadhafi dictatorship in Libya has been followed by civil conflict and the opening of the country to terrorists and people smugglers. Europe has felt the impact of the collapse of order in the Middle East and North Africa through an upsurge in terrorism within its own borders and an extraordinary human tide of migrants, many of them refugees fleeing conflict but including others seeking a better future away from poverty and lawlessness.

Across the Atlantic, the US has become more distant from European security, focusing more of its attention on the growth of Chinese military power in the Pacific. The US decision to step back following the overthrow of Colonel Gadhafi in Libya in 2011 reflected a belief on the part of the Obama administration that, after the disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003, it should be less ready to intervene but also a feeling that European countries should do more to protect their own regional security. The outcome of the 2016 Presidential election could, in the event of a Trump victory, contribute to a further weakening of the USA's post-war relationship with Europe.

As if all these developments were not enough, the EU's new security strategy was published a few days after one of its most important international actors and military powers, the United Kingdom, had voted to leave the EU, two weeks before the third major terrorist attack in France in two years and less than three weeks before a failed coup attempt in Turkey raised new doubts about the vital partnership with a key EU neighbour (and an applicant for membership as well as a leading member of NATO). A rare positive development in recent times was the publication by Germany in July 2016 of a landmark defence white paper proposing a more active German defence posture.

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1 The full text can be found at: https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf

The changed security backdrop since the last EU security white paper is a warning that further change is inevitable. The security implications of climate change and of Europe's lack of energy security are two examples of likely future risks.

The strategy in summary

Covering almost 60 pages, the white paper is a substantial and ambitious document. The declaration of intent is clear from its first sentence: 'We need a stronger Europe' and it argues that this is what Europe's citizens deserve and the world expects. In the succeeding sections the strategy sets out why the EU needs to do more to protect its security; what that means in practice; how it connects with wider EU policy goals in areas such as trade, development and global institutions; and how the vision should be translated into action.

Interests and principles
In the first of four sections, the paper discusses the EU's security interests and the principles that should cover its policy approach. The four elements of this are:

- Peace and security – the EU will promote peace and 'guarantee the security of its citizens and territory'

- Prosperity – 'the EU will advance the prosperity of its people' through a strong internal market and an open international economic system

- Democracy – the EU will 'foster the resilience of its democracies' and live up to its own values of the rule of law

- A rules-based global order – 'the EU will promote a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core'.[2]

This first section is short but provides the foundation for what follows. It re-affirms long-standing EU policies and is entirely consistent with its 2003 strategy.

Principles guiding external action
The paper's second section briefly looks at four principles which it argues should be the basis of the EU's approach to external action:

- Unity – the EU must stand united, and it argues that this has 'never been so vital nor so urgent'; this is essential because it is the combined weight of the EU that has influence in the world

- Engagement – the EU needs to reach out and engage with others in the world, not just in security but in market regulation, the environment and climate change; 'the external cannot be separated from the internal', it argues

- Responsibility – in a more contested world the EU should be guided by a 'strong sense of responsibility', this includes acting swiftly in response to violence, particularly in Europe and its neighbourhood but also includes wider goals such as addressing the root causes of conflict, including poverty

- Partnership – responsibility must be shared, the paper says, and the EU will be a responsible global stakeholder that works in partnership with others.

Priorities for external action
The third section is by far the largest and is more detailed. In five sub-sections it examines the security problems and the most important regional issues relevant to the EU, including looking at enlargement and neighbourhood policies.

Beginning with security issues, the section identifies five aspects relevant to the security of the EU today:

- The need for Europeans to take greater responsibility for their security – it is noticeable that this section uses 'Europeans' and not the 'EU' or 'Member States'; it notes that most EU Member States rely on NATO to defend its members from external attack, but it argues that Europeans must be better prepared to contribute to that collective defence effectively and to have the capacity to act autonomously; without prejudicing the existing role of NATO, the EU should deepen its co-operation with NATO; there must be more defence co-operation between EU Member States, including ensuring inter-operability, to make resources go further, and EU funding for defence research

- Counter-terrorism is another area where the paper argues for greater co-operation, and some policy changes, including in this case more EU support for measures to prevent radicalisation and to protect critical infrastructure

- The strategy says the EU should increase its focus on cyber security, both internally and in its partnerships with others, including NATO and the USA

- Energy security is a key policy for the EU already and the paper notes the link between greater energy security and the proposed EU energy union in order to create a stronger internal energy market and to improve security of supply

- A significant change is the introduction of strategic communications as one of the five aspects of security; although a small part of this chapter, the paper says that the EU will invest in its strategic communications and provide better rebuttal and other information services.

The paper moves on to look at what it calls 'state and societal resilience' in the EU's eastern and southern neighbours. This part covers the future of enlargement and neighbourhood policies as well as migration policy.

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2 All quotations from pp14-15.

Key points include:

- That it is in the EU's interest to invest in making the states near the EU more resilient; a resilient state is one with a strong economy and democratic institutions

- Reiterating the EU's conditional approach to enlargement but acknowledging the resilience issues in the current candidate countries in the Western Balkans and that existing EU funding needs to make direct improvements in citizens lives

- For the European Neighbourhood Policy countries, the EU holds out the prospect of creating an economic area of those with an FTA with the EU which would embody elements of the Trans-European Networks and energy policies

- A reiteration of much of recent EU policy on the challenge of migration, including the need for more effective asylum policies.

Turning to the EU's approach to conflicts and crises, the strategy argues the focus should be mostly in the regions to the east and the south of the EU. In these areas the EU should engage in peacebuilding, with an approach that is multi-dimensional (to reflect the complex nature of these situations), multi-phased (to reflect that these situations are often protracted), multi-layered (because of the need to work from the local up to the national) and multi-lateral (because many different players are involved).

Arguing that the EU has a good record on conflict prevention work, the strategy calls for more emphasis on that aspect but it warns that early warning is of little use if it is not followed by action. There needs to be a 'political culture of acting sooner in response to the risk of violent conflict'. It goes on to argue that 'European security and defence must become better equipped to build peace, guarantee security and protect human lives'.[3] This is so that security can be provided when peace agreements are reached and to support transition.

In the final part of this section, the paper goes into detail on some of the specific regional conflicts of importance to the EU. This includes a sharply critical section on Russian action in Ukraine, including a commitment that the EU will not recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea, but also a promise to remain engaged with Russia in order to discuss this and other disagreements.

Considerable attention is devoted to the Middle East and North Africa. Points here include:

- Fostering dialogue to end regional conflicts in Iraq and Syria

- Continuing the EU's long-standing support for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine dispute

- Utilising the existing Union for the Mediterranean as part of the EU's practical co-operation.

There is a promise to deepen co-operation with Turkey, in the context of the on-going accession negotiations and the work to counter-terrorism and to tackle irregular migration. This will include action to modernise the customs union with Turkey and to work on visa liberalisation.

The paper calls for more work with the Gulf countries and a new engagement with Iran, to build on the recent nuclear agreement.

The EU's commitment to Africa, including work with its existing partners in bodies such as the African Union and the East African Community, is re-affirmed. Atlantic co-operation is mentioned too; with the emphasis on completing the trade talks with the US successfully, and developing stronger ties with South American and Caribbean nations.

Two new areas of concern appear in the paper: Asia and the Arctic. In respect of Asia, the paper sees a 'direct connection' between prosperity in the EU and security in Asia. It talks of deepening the EU's economic diplomacy in Asia and 'scaling up' its security role there.[4] The latter includes stronger security ties with Indonesia, Japan and South Korea.

The paper notes that three EU Member States are Arctic Council members (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) as well as two further members of the European Economic Area (Iceland and Norway) and that the EU has a strategic interest in ensuring that the Arctic remains 'a low tension area'.[5]

A final section covers the EU's support for global governance, and covers a wide area, from the UN's structures to peacekeeping, and the promotion of multilateral trade deals.

Having set out a wide range of interests and an ambitious set of policy commitments, the strategy turns to the delivery of these policies. Here the emphasis is on the practical, influenced by the thought that soft power is not enough to give the EU credibility. There are detailed lists of capabilities that must be improved. These include:

- Member States spending more on defence

- Twenty per cent of defence spending should go on procurement and research and development

- The need for the adoption by the Council of a civilian and military strategy setting out tasks, capabilities and requirements

- Emphasis on more, and more effective, defence co-operation between Member States (see below)

- Changing the voluntary approach to one with clear commitments, annual reviews and increased coherence in defence planning and capability.

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3 P.30, op cit.

4 P.37, op cit.
5 P.39, op cit.

On the detail of military issues, a question that has dogged the EU for many years following the failure to make much of a reality of the battlegroups established in the past, the paper suggests enhanced co-operation by a limited group of Member States would be one way forward, so that those Member States willing to do more can proceed. But the strategy sees these developments in the context of the relationship with NATO rather than as a substitute for it. It also emphasises the importance of a more rapid response to crises, in diplomacy as well as operationally and the need for a more joined-up approach within the EU. And all the proposals are explicitly within the framework laid down in the existing EU Treaties, i.e. they require unanimous agreement within the Council.

Analysis

A new approach
The 2016 strategy sensibly reflects the significant changes in the EU's regional security situation since 2003. Any notion that Europe was largely free from major external threats, and that a major conflict was unlikely on its own continent, has been swept away by events in Ukraine, North Africa and the Middle East. As Robert Cooper, a former senior British and EU diplomat has put it:

> While we dreamed, naively perhaps, of a ring of peaceful, well-governed states around us, Russia's ambition seems to be ensuring that its neighbours are weakened by conflict and poor government.[6]

A series of major terrorist atrocities inside the EU have highlighted the way in which internal and external security are bound up together, requiring a more comprehensive approach to security policy in which counter-terrorism and conflict prevention, to take two examples, are not separate but are closely linked.

In the strategy EU policymakers have recognised the changed environment and the need for a more effective and joined-up approach. For example, development policy must in future be better aligned with the EU's global strategy. But energy, economic and cultural policies all also need to be more closely linked to the strategy, as it recognises.

The emphasis is on the need for greater co-operation between Member States and their national policies (see below under defence spending) and with NATO. Here an important change was quickly made reality in the days after the publication of the strategy with the signing of a joint agreement between the EU and NATO for greater co-operation.[7] Past talk of a 'European Army' is not referenced in the strategy at all; instead the strategy attempts to bring an end to the notion of the EU as a rival to NATO with the emphasis on co-operation between the two but also a recognition that they have distinct roles.

The strategy reflects changes in the threat environment since 2003. This is particularly apparent in the growing importance of cyber security, an issue which the paper dwells on (and for which the EU already has a technical co-operation agreement with NATO). The cyber-attacks on Estonia in 2007 were a warning of the potency of the internet as a weapon and developments since then have only heightened concern.[8]

Including strategic communications as an area of concern and where improvement is needed is no doubt partly a response to the way populists in the EU sought to blame the EU's approach to Ukraine for Russia's annexation of Crimea (and had some success in so doing). This, and other examples of EU communications failures, point to the need for the EU to change its approach and move to a more active posture.

Defence spending
The strategy recognises the need for greater defence spending by Member States and for them to get better value by co-operating in defence procurement. This is welcome but there must be questions about its realism, given the austerity policies of Member States (which have reduced rather than increased military spending since the financial crisis) and the low levels of economic growth of recent years in many Member States.[9] The rise in terrorist events poses a further challenge, as it is likely to lead to increased pressure on national governments to increase spending on police, intelligence and domestic security agencies in order to try and prevent attacks rather than investing in their armed forces. The UK, for example, has taken to including some of its domestic security costs within its defence spending for the purposes of the NATO target of two per cent of GDP being spent on defence, but this has not been without controversy.

Much will depend on the EU Defence Action Plan, which will cover these issues and which will be published later in 2016. It will need to overcome longstanding reluctance within the EU to including defence procurement in the Single Market, to joint procurement of weapons and equipment and to sharing sensitive national information about military capabilities.[10]

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6 The EU's Global Strategy: Three Quotations, Robert Cooper, European Council on Foreign Relations, 15.07.16: http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_eus_global_strategy_three_quotations_7077

7 EU and NATO deepen co-operation, European Commission, 08.07.16: http://ec.europa.eu/news/2016/07/20160707_en.htm

8 'The history of cyber attacks, a timeline,' *NATO Review,* 2013: http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2013/cyber/timeline/EN/index.htm

9 Data on defence spending in EU countries can be found in, *European defence spending 2015: the force awakens,* Zoe Stanley-Lockman & Katharina Wolf, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Issue Brief 10, 2016: www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Brief_10_Defence_spending.pdf

10 Discussed in, 'European defence: More smoke but will there be fire?' Nick Witney, European Council on Foreign Relations, 14.09.16: http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_european_defence_more_smoke_but_will_there_be_fire7122

Greater EU military intervention?

Much of the debate about the EU's role in security has dwelt on the question of how willing it is to intervene militarily. A number of senior politicians have advocated a 'European Army', which would make the EU's commitment to greater military action real. This concept has always run up against the requirement for unanimity in defence decisions within the EU, the UK being one of a number of objectors to such a proposal, seeing it as unnecessary and likely to undermine NATO.

The strategy is very clear that the EU's approach needs to change:

> In this fragile world, soft power is not enough: we must enhance our credibility in security and defence.[11]

The EU has for some years had a commitment on paper to flexible, mobile forces that could intervene rapidly – the EU battlegroups. But they have never been deployed in practice. As the strategy says, the EU,

> Must develop the capacity for rapid response also by tackling the procedural, financial and political obstacles which prevent the deployment of the Battlegroups, hamper force generation and reduce the effectiveness of CSDP military operations.[12]

The reality is that of three obstacles referred to in that sentence, it is the political that has been the greatest. Deploying military forces overseas is difficult for any Member State and particularly so for some of them; this has resulted in a tendency to set national rules of engagement that reduce the risk to the lives of the soldiers being deployed but also hamper their effectiveness, and their ability to work with allies on the ground. Some of these difficulties have been seen in existing NATO and EU military deployments overseas, notably with NATO forces in Afghanistan.

As discussed below, if the EU is to play a greater military role it is these political problems about deployment that will have to be overcome.

The Turkey question

The importance of Turkey runs through the paper but the situation in Turkey was in flux before the strategy was adopted because of the drift of the Erdogan Government's policies away from Turkey's twentieth century secular path, the revived conflict with the Kurdish separatist movement and the impact of the Syrian civil war. Following the failed coup attempt of July 2016, which took place after the paper was published, the situation in Turkey is even more uncertain.

These uncertainties do not diminish Turkey's importance to the EU – as a candidate country, a member of the EU's customs union, large neighbour and member of NATO - but they are likely to make the relationship even more complex than it already has been and however welcome the coup's failure, actions by the Turkish Government which are inconsistent with EU membership will only make it more problematic.

What's the EU role in Asia?

The strategy raises for the first time the notion of an EU interest in Asia beyond the economic. Given the distances involved and the absence of a European military presence in Asia of any significance, this idea raises many questions. Is this involvement in security in Asia realistic and deliverable? The EU does have an interest in upholding the rule of law in the seas around China, and in resisting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It also has a great deal of trade with China, India and Japan that it wants to protect and it does not wish to see Islamic terrorism spread further beyond Afghanistan and the subcontinent but what contribution can the EU bring to security here? The strategy does not explain this and it will need to be further developed to give credibility to this rationale.

The British dimension

A late addition to the foreword to the paper is a mention of the implications of the UK's referendum on EU membership. As has been pointed out, the UK's defence spending is about a quarter of all EU Member States' defence spending and it has almost a quarter of the EU's deployable soldiers.[13] The UK leaving the EU risks doing considerable damage to the organisation's status and credibility in terms of its foreign and security policy. But the UK will be losing influence too; it will not so easily be able to persuade other European countries to share its foreign and security policy goals. For example, the UK has played an important role in ensuring the maintenance of tough sanctions against Russia following its annexation of Crimea. An EU without the UK might be less inclined to be continue this tough line.

In addition, the departure of the UK means that the EU will lose the use of the UK's sophisticated joint forces command and control facility at Northwood. This could have implications for the debate about whether the EU should establish its own operational military HQ in Brussels.

Outside the EU the UK would still have a strong interest in the EU being an effective actor in regional security and on the global stage. Most of its NATO partners will also be EU Member States but it will have less influence in the EU and no seat at the table. The EU itself might, in pursuit of the 'strategic autonomy' that the strategy suggests is desirable, move away from NATO and seek to become a significant player in global security in its own right. Shifts in United States policies' could hasten that. But without the UK, the EU would have

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11 P. 44, op cit.
12 P.47, op cit.

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13 NATO, the EU & Brexit: Joining Forces? Ian Bond, Centre for European Reform, 05.07.16: http://www.cer.org.uk/insights/nato-eu-and-brexit-joining-forces

much reduced forces, less defence spending, a smaller economy and would contain, as now, many smaller states with little interest in, and even less capacity for, intervening militarily. Brexit is likely to weaken both the EU and the UK in the international security field.

The political questions

The ambitious scope of the strategy, its greater length and depth compared to the first strategy in 2003, and the length of time devoted to its preparation indicate a step-change in EU policymaker's attitude to security policy. But, as so often with the EU, the biggest challenge lies not in agreeing a bolder and more comprehensive strategy on paper but in delivering it. The potential of the EU to influence events in its neighbourhood has not been in doubt but its willingness to do so effectively has.

There are signs of a change in direction, as events have driven a number of Member States to rethink their approach to foreign and security policy. The 2016 German defence White Paper is of particular importance because it suggests a change of direction in German policy.[14] Despite having powerful armed forces, Germany's history and strict constitutional requirements have led it to be reluctant to deploy military force overseas, except in peacekeeping roles. This cultural and political inhibition has greatly reduced the ability of European countries to act together, for example in response to events in Libya in 2011.

Building on the signs of greater Germany willingness to commit forces to combat overseas, the strategy suggests that one way forward would be for several Member States to work together using the enhanced co-operation procedure provided for in the EU Treaties. This would imply some of the larger Member States, such as France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland, agreeing to pool resources in some ways in order to create more powerful (as well as mobile and flexible) military forces that could be deployed in circumstances where NATO (i.e. the Americans) is not engaged. This notion of enhanced co-operation in this field is not new but the Cameron Government was hostile to it; it may be that the UK leaving the EU could result in a shifting of that blockage particularly in regard to the creation of an EU military headquarters to plan and direct agreed joint operations.[15]

As the development of the strategy moves from the paper to the delivery phase, the EU will have to produce clear evidence of the political leadership and the financial resources necessary to make a reality of the bold vision it has adopted. Without that level of commitment there will be a danger of the strategy being seen as empty rhetoric which reduces rather than enhances the EU's credibility in the security field.

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14 *White Paper on Germany Security Policy & the future of the Bundeswehr,* 2016, English edition: https://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg/en/

15 This was suggested by the President of the European Commission in his 2016 State of the European Union address to the European Parliament: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-16-3043_en.htm