

BRIEFING NOTE

WHY THE EU NEEDS A SECURITY STRATEGY

By Steven Everts, Senior Research Fellow, and Heather Grabbe, Research Director

The EU urgently needs a security strategy. At present the notion of a credible European foreign policy provokes derisive laughter – and not just in Washington. What Europe lacks, even more than military capabilities, is a shared vision of today's security threats and adequate policy responses. One of the main reasons behind the EU's divisions over Iraq was the lack of a shared threat assessment. Each country first formed its own national viewpoint, and then tried half-heartedly to find a common stance with its European neighbours.

If Europeans cannot agree on threats and how to deal with them, EU foreign policy will never succeed. That is why the EU foreign ministers' recent decision to task Javier Solana, the EU's foreign policy chief, with drawing up a security strategy deserves full support. Europeans need a shared view of what are today's most serious problems more than they need the Convention's institutional fine-tuning. A security strategy would also do much more for EU foreign policy than pursuing the chimaera of a Belgian-led defence core.

There are four main reasons for the EU to formulate a security strategy. First, the Europeans need to come to terms with how much the international landscape has changed after September 11th. Concretely, this means agreeing how to respond to major threats and to a US administration which combines pre-eminence with pre-emption. If Europeans could develop a coherent assessment of this new world, it would help them to decide what relationship they want with this new America. They need to do so as Europeans, not just as Germans, British or French.

Second, the EU is still divided into camps on its foreign policy ambitions. The group that wants to pursue an activist and global foreign policy needs to out-argue the camp that wants to keep the status quo or which just has a regional outlook. This divide is perhaps more damaging in the long term than the split between the Euro-Gaullists and Euro-Atlanticists. True, France and Britain are deeply divided on how to deal with a more assertive and less accommodating US. But in fact, neither Britain's loyal acquiescence nor France's vocal opposition has been terribly effective in influencing the US. What is needed is a blending of UK and French strategies: Blairism with bite. Moreover, on the substance of most other international issues – Israel-Palestine, terrorism, Iran, Russia, failed states and so on – French and British perspectives are closer than current headlines suggest. The process of drawing up a security strategy should make it easier to strike the necessary policy bargains, and put them into practice. It should also help to reconcile the activists – like France and the UK – with the pacifists – like Germany and the neutral countries – on the question of when the use of force is justified.

Third, the EU prides itself in being good at deploying 'soft power': the ability to influence other countries through attraction rather than coercion. In practice, however, the EU needs to use its trade, aid and other policies to support a clear political strategy. The EU has been rather good at putting out grand declarations and long lists of 'key priorities'. But it has been poor at devising concrete policies aimed at tackling concrete

problems. An EU security concept should help to address the weakest link in EU external relations: the connection between objectives and instruments.

Fourth, the EU needs to overcome its tendency to react to crises with glorified ad-hocery. Too often the EU can only agree for ministers 'to monitor the situation', not what actions to take. Instead, the EU needs to set out how it might respond to certain types of behaviour, and give Javier Solana a mandate to implement pre-identified responses. A security strategy should identify what kinds of developments would trigger what sort of reaction.

A significant section of the EU security strategy should focus on WMD proliferation – not to please Washington but because Europeans have never discussed it seriously amongst themselves. The EU would then take WMD threats more seriously. But the EU should not be afraid to advocate a distinctive set of policies to counter proliferation. The EU's policy mix will be different from Washington's in the balance between strengthening international treaties, beefing up inspection and verification mechanisms, implementing sanctions, and using military force.

America should welcome an EU security strategy, even if will crystallise some differences with US on how to respond to specific problems. A weak Europe, oscillating between internal divisions and inaction, cannot be the strategic partner that Washington says it wants.

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