



# Policy Brief

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## Revisiting the European Security Strategy – beyond 2008

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### Background

Four years after the European Security Strategy (ESS) was adopted at the December 2003 European Council, Javier Solana has been asked by EU leaders to revisit the issue. This request from the December 2007 Summit was somewhat surprising, given that the ESS is a policy document which has stood the test of time to an unusual extent.

However, the December 2007 Presidency Conclusions did not ask for an update or a rewriting of the strategy. Rather, they invited “the Secretary General/High Representative (for Common Foreign and Security Policy – CFSP), in full association with the Commission and in close cooperation with the Member States, to examine the implementation” of the ESS, “with a view to proposing elements on how to improve the implementation and, as appropriate, elements to complement it, for adoption by the European Council in December 2008”.

The emphasis, in other words, was entirely on its *implementation* “in

the light of all the evolutions which have taken place since, in particular the experiences drawn from ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy) operations”.

#### **A job well done**

It will nevertheless be difficult to avoid reassessing the analytical grid and tentative prescriptions contained in the ESS – and indeed it would be wrong to do so, even though the ESS arguably ranks alongside the Laeken Declaration of December 2001 as one of the best EU documents ever written: concise but not superficial, neither too self-congratulatory nor necessarily based on the lowest common denominator.

Launched in early May 2003, at the end of the Iraq war, the ESS was initially aimed at mending fences both inside the EU and across the Atlantic after the deep divisions of the previous months. But the Strategy rapidly became a broader consensus-building exercise for the enlarged EU.

The document was prepared by a group of Mr Solana’s close aides without ever being submitted to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) or the Political and Security Committee (PSC); i.e. it was never ‘negotiated’ through the usual intergovernmental channels. Instead, it was drafted in two phases: a first version was presented by Mr Solana to the June 2003 European Council, which “took note” of it and asked him to broaden the discussion (through, among other things, a series of workshops) and come up with a final text. This was eventually approved in December 2003 under the title “A secure Europe in a better world”.

After the Strategy was approved, Mr Solana firmly resisted calls to translate it into a series of specific action plans, arguing that it must remain a set of guidelines for possible action, not a prescriptive document. For some time, until the Constitutional Treaty was signed in October 2004, the Strategy was even occasionally quoted in

Joint Actions as a 'soft law' basis for launching ESDP operations whose scope went beyond the original 'Petersberg tasks' enshrined in Article 17 of the EU Treaty.

Yet the ESS is not only about the ESDP. In a way, it is not even a 'strategy' – a term that is often misused and abused in current EU practice and parlance – as it has become the closest thing to a European foreign and security policy 'doctrine', and also an effective tool of public diplomacy. As such, it remains as relevant as when it was first published.

### Five years later

While the original Introduction to the ESS sounds slightly outdated now, the "key threats" and "global challenges" identified in 2003 have not changed significantly, with only marginal shifts in emphasis.

Regarding global terrorism, the ESS pointed out already that Europe represented "both a target and a base". Since then, especially after the Madrid and London bombings, it has become increasingly apparent that home-grown terrorism is a peculiarly European phenomenon which requires specific responses – including finding an acceptable balance

between security and liberty, both personal and collective.

The struggle against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is now less focused on North Korea (let alone Iraq) and much more on the potential fall-out from Iran's nuclear programme. There appears to be less risk of 'loose nukes', but the possibility of 'dirty' bombs loaded with 'portable' (e.g. biological) WMD has not disappeared at all.

Regional conflicts (old and new) are still clearly visible on our radar screens, from the Balkans to the Middle East, as are the 'frozen' ones in and around Europe. What were previously internal conflicts – in Afghanistan, Darfur and the Horn of Africa - are spreading to neighbouring areas.

We now speak less of "State failure" as such and more of "State 'fragility'". While 'failure' is rare and often irreversible, 'fragility' is more widespread and permits (indeed, may even require) timely and proactive "preventive engagement", as advocated in the ESS.

Eurobarometer surveys suggest that one-third of EU citizens now believe organised crime should be the Union's main security priority,

probably reflecting the fact that it is increasingly making its presence felt in activities related to the normal functioning of our societies – from banking and finance to public utility services.

Furthermore, Europe's energy dependency has been underlined by recurrent crises on the continent itself and by the dramatic rise in oil prices worldwide. Energy security has become a major problem that also affects and constrains foreign policy.

Climate-related emergencies such as floods, droughts and forest fires now occur more frequently, and climate change may aggravate the struggle for natural and energy resources, deplete food and fish stocks, and destabilise 'fragile' regions and ill-governed countries – thus generating new conflicts and reinforcing migratory pressures.

Other 'wild cards' have become more apparent, from the SARS and 'bird flu' scares to the Asian *tsunami* of December 2004, and from intrusive cyberattacks by foreign hackers to financial disruption triggered by traders. More natural and man-made emergencies – often transcending national (and EU) boundaries – may be in the offing.

## State of play

The "strategic objectives" set in 2003 still hold too, but we are now more aware of the difficulties in achieving them.

Even though it is not primarily a challenge for the EU *per se*, Afghanistan is proving hard to tackle – and not only in military terms. Defining 'success' in Kabul is a demanding task. The 'quick in, quick out' approach that initially characterised such operations is no longer valid, but the long haul ('quick in, long in') is neither popular with the public nor

sustainable with limited capabilities. Exit strategies are also harder to envisage, as the ultimate goal is more elusive.

"Building security in the neighbourhood" is a moving target. In the Balkans, the Union's 'transformative' power is no longer as effective as it once was elsewhere. This is in part due to the doubts that have arisen within the EU itself over enlargement, which have weakened its hand in dealing with countries in the region. But it is also true that the

Union's expansion has evolved into both a State- and a *Member* State-building exercise that may now require a new approach to 'conditionality'.

Moreover, Russia's increased assertiveness (coupled with Europe's recurrent disunity in dealing with it) has made addressing 'frozen' conflicts ever more problematic, while the Union's Mediterranean policies – in the framework of the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy – appear to have reached

a critical point and are certainly making little headway.

'Fragility' in the wider EU periphery, power politics in the East, instability in the South and growing competition for resources worldwide – this is the broad-brush picture of European security in 2008. Added to this are the growing links between the international and domestic/societal dimensions of security, making this policy area quintessentially 'intermestic'.

### **Multi- and 'mini'-lateralism**

On top of this, the "effective multilateralism" advocated in the ESS – as a principle, a means and an end in itself – is proving a serious challenge. The Union performed well after the 2006 crisis in Lebanon, but Kosovo is now looking almost intractable, as "effectiveness" and "multilateralism" appear mutually incompatible (albeit for reasons largely beyond the EU's control). Acting on Darfur presents comparable dilemmas; arms control regimes are ailing; the Doha trade negotiations are stuck; and global arrangements to curb carbon emissions are stuttering.

This is not to say that "effective multilateralism" is unattainable or even wrong. On the contrary: for the EU, it may prove as much a necessity as a choice. The international environment has evolved since 2003, with an increasing number of players to be taken into account - old and new, and all strongly sovereignty-minded and focused on short-term gains.

The resulting 'competitive interdependence' leaves the Union more vulnerable: delivering results becomes harder even when the goals are fairly reasonable and realistic, and even when the EU and the US broadly agree on them (which was by no means a foregone conclusion in 2003).

This is also why the link between the quest for "effective multilateralism" and cooperation with possible "strategic partners" needs to be better articulated. In what was arguably its weakest section, the ESS mentioned among these "partners" (in questionable order and company) Japan, China, Canada and India – a list that, if at all necessary, now demands some adjustments.

The Union and/or its main Member States keenly participate in 'mini-lateral' fora related to specific crisis situations, from the G8 to the Contact Group on the Balkans, from the Middle East 'Quartet' to the '5+1' on Iran. Some "strategic partners" matter more in some configurations than others, and other actors also play a role. "Working with partners", therefore, needs to be turned more explicitly and consistently into a vehicle for achieving effective multilateral solutions and for giving the EU as such more visibility and clout.

### **Qualified progress**

The "policy implications" drawn from all this by the ESS remain valid too.

The EU has definitely become "more active" on the international scene: what was already a promising start by late 2003 has since blossomed into a wide array of diplomatic initiatives and, above all, overseas missions. Although some of these have been largely symbolic and intended as EU flag-waving exercises and to build a preliminary operational *acquis*, the latest ones – the civilian mission in Kosovo and the military one in Chad – appear to be in a different league. That said, Member States still want to remain free to choose whether to act through the EU, NATO, the United Nations or other, looser formats on a case-by-case basis.

The EU is also becoming "more coherent" in how it conducts its external policies. Apart from a

few hiccups (in preparations for the 2005 mission in Aceh or the legal dispute over small arms), the Council and the Commission seem to have found a workable *modus vivendi* and *operandi*.

Indeed, the basic intuition behind the ESS – that crisis management must be integrated, comprehensive and not exclusively based on the use of force – has been vindicated by the experience of recent years. For its part, the Lisbon Treaty creates a new 'architecture' for foreign policy-making that is expected to increase coherence and effectiveness within and outside the Union – although implementing it fully will take time.

Coherence, however, does not – and will not – depend solely on the institutions on the two sides of Brussels' Rue de la Loi. Member States' behaviour must also be looked at (for example, when it comes to selling military equipment to third countries), as must other international players – 'partners' as well as organisations – involved in crisis management alongside the EU.

Whether the Union is becoming "more capable" remains, however, an open question. Institutional and operational capabilities have improved since 2003: lessons have been learned and applied in preparing for possible future challenges.

More Member States now seem willing and able to put up forces for common operations than previously. Still, the overall 'pool' of European capabilities has grown only marginally, and some countries are nearing a critical point in terms of overseas commitments and military overstretch.

The readiness of individual Member States to resort to force in peace-support operations remains uneven. This may ultimately create a two-tier system which would raise sensitive questions about internal solidarity

and burden-sharing. However, this would not undermine common policies provided appropriate arrangements are made in terms of decision-making and funding.

Similarly, differences persist regarding Member States' willingness to resort to 'negative' diplomacy (sanctions and penalties) when these could be useful and necessary. In other words, more solidarity is needed, and not

only because a new clause in the Lisbon Treaty mentions it.

Finally, evaluating European capabilities is also about assessing what is needed for what purposes, and opinions on this still tend to vary within the EU. On the whole, however, devoting more resources to the outside world should become an overarching imperative for the Union, not least given how

much less relevant our continent is expected to be in 20 years' time.

By then, the EU will simply not be able to afford to spend more than two-thirds of its common budget on internal policies, as its share of world population, trade and GDP will be a fraction of what it is today. Europe's relative demotion will thus have to be balanced out with a stronger global presence and self-promotion.

## Prospects

Interestingly, Mr Solana's report will virtually coincide with the tenth anniversary of the December 1998 St. Malo Declaration, with which France and the UK launched what has become known as ESDP. By then, hopefully, both French President Nicolas Sarkozy and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown will feel ready to walk in the footsteps of their predecessors and inject new momentum into European foreign and security policy ambitions.

The St. Malo anniversary and Mr Solana's report will also fall between the US presidential elections and the new administration's inauguration. There may be no better moment to send messages across the Atlantic and reconfigure EU-US relations on a new basis after the storms of recent years. After all, Americans now know that they can still 'go it alone' but cannot 'do it alone'.

Lastly, Mr Solana's report will shortly precede the Lisbon Treaty's likely entry into force. It could therefore come to represent the beginning, rather than the end, of a broader reassessment of the goals of Europe's foreign and security policy and the means to achieve them.

If so, it could well turn into a team-building exercise for the new EU leadership due to be appointed by October 2009. Such a possible second stage – to be developed if and when the new Treaty enters into force – should also properly involve the relevant Commission services. This is crucial for both a more comprehensive *foreign* policy, including the external ramifications of other common policies, and a more integrated *security* policy, including its internal ('homeland') dimension.

The final reassessment, due in June or October 2009, could thus become a regular exercise for the High Representative/Commission Vice-President – to be repeated at the end of the following term, in 2014.

In conclusion, revisiting the ESS may entail some recalibration and minor adjustments, plus some new "elements" for better implementation. The report could assess what has changed (and what has not) since 2003, highlight the new challenges ahead and possibly be entitled "A stronger Europe in a better world", thus stressing the need for a less self-centred and inward-looking and more assertive approach.

In it, however, the nexus between common *values* and common *interests* must be better articulated: all too often these are disjointed, and not only between the national and the EU level. Our shared values need to be woven into our shared interests. Values should guide the pursuit of interests, not substitute for them. Interests, in turn, should contribute to affirming values.

By the same token, *processes* need to be geared more explicitly towards producing *outcomes* rather than being seen as ends in their own right: be they intra-EU or transatlantic, multi- or 'mini'-lateral, they must bring tangible results within reasonable time frames.

Finally, the report should underline that the EU's increased *presence* in the world should translate into comparable *influence*, which has not always been the case. Tomorrow's world requires this – and so does today's Europe.

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