

Why Europe needs a new European Security Strategy

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This Policy Brief argues that the European Union's foreign and security policy's ability to deliver would benefit from a rewriting of the European Security Strategy from 2003. Drafting a new European Security Strategy in 2013 is necessary and timely, particularly in times of shifting power configurations, a relative power decline on the part of Europe and a post-Lisbon EU that is in need of a clear 'mission statement'.

The need, timeliness and purpose of a new European Security Strategy

A new European security strategy featured on the agenda of the informal 'Gymnich' meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Copenhagen in March 2012. Particularly the smaller member states, such as Finland and Sweden, were advocating the inclusion of the item on the agenda. Nothing came of the informal discussions, but the idea to undertake a strategic rethinking exercise has nevertheless surfaced and will resurface. Two of the 'big three' (the [UK](#) and [Germany](#)) are as yet undecided, but their parliamentarians are stirring, while in France the new government seems to agree.¹ In recent years, a lobby of individual scholars, think-tanks, advisers and policy-makers has consistently urged the European Union and its member states to revise or create a new strategic document to replace the [European Security Strategy](#) from 2003.² Their main arguments are that the ESS of 2003 is outdated, does not connect threats, ends and means and is too vague on common interests and the EU's ambitions. However, responding to a question at a conference in Brussels in February, High Representative Catherine Ashton did not seem to be convinced that the current European Security Strategy has outlived its usefulness. She doubted the wisdom of

producing more paper and stressed the need to 'deliver'.

This Policy Brief will assess, first of all, the need, timeliness and purpose of revisiting the European Security Strategy. To what extent is 'A secure Europe in a Better World' from 2003, and its [update from 2008](#), outdated?

1. See: 'EU/Defence: 'Jean-Yves Le Drian speaks of giving fresh impetus to European Defence'', Europe Diplomacy and Defence, No. 520, 7 June 2012
2. For example: Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont (eds.), Europe Deploys. Towards a Civil-Military Strategy for CSDP, Egmont Paper 49, Royal Institute for International Relations, Academia Press, Brussels, June 2011; Nicole Gnesotto, 'The Need for a More Strategic EU', in: Álvaro De Vasconcelos (ed.), What ambitions for European Defence in 2020? Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2nd Edition, 29-38, 2009; Ronja Kempin and Marco Overhaus, 'Europa braucht eine neue Sicherheitsstrategie. Überlegungen und Fahrplan zur Neufassung der ESS'. SWP Aktuell 10, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 2012; Jan Joel Anderson et al., The European Security Strategy: Reinvigorate, revise or reinvent? UI Occasional Papers, Nr. 7, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2011.

Do changes in Europe's strategic position in the international system and changing circumstances in the EU itself merit a reconsideration?

Secondly, embarking on a new European Security Strategy may well be a risky endeavour. This Brief asks whether the possible negative consequences outweigh the potential benefits.

Thirdly, some consensus about the necessity of a strategic revision seems to be emerging. However, it remains contested what the scope and the shape of a new document should be. Also, the process leading up to a strategic reassessment is of importance. This Brief concludes with a number of recommendations.

[The EU must change its security outlook to remain relevant in a changing world](#)

There are a number of reasons that support the necessity of a new European Security Strategy and the timing of starting this process as soon as possible. Many of these reasons are internal to the EU itself, but the most compelling ones lie outside the European Union.

The current European Security Strategy was developed in the strategic context of 2003. Almost a decade later the international context has changed. This has implications for the EU's strategic position and the relevance of the current strategy. A new strategy is needed to bring about a change in thinking on a number of politically challenging questions of the EU's role in international security.

Is the EU's 'effective multilateralism' approach still suited to the new strategic environment? The Clingendael Strategic Monitor 2012 ([EN/NL](#)), a forward-looking study on global issues and reflecting widely shared analyses, concluded that the world is becoming a less cooperative place. Non-state actors are gaining importance, although states remain the dominant actors. Uncertainty in the international system is increasing, as is the likelihood of strategic shocks and insecurity. The international system is moving from the multilateral arrangements of the past decades towards a multipolar system in which multilateralism is increasingly sidelined. A new strategy should address the question of to what extent 'effective multilateralism', central to the 2003 strategy, is applicable in the new strategic context. Whether it

is still sufficient 'as it is', needs to be revised, or additional supplementary approaches need to be developed.

What should the EU's position in the international system be? How to engage with rising powers? The global financial and economic crisis has accelerated the rise of the BRIC countries. The EU currently faces stark financial and economic problems, and although there is a possibility that the EU will emerge from the crisis in a strengthened position, looming problems such as an ageing demography bring risks to economic growth in the mid to long term. Conversely, the BRICs with rapidly growing economies are asserting themselves on the international stage with increasing confidence. A weakening EU has to be more mindful of the positions it takes. The current strategy and the EU 'strategic partnerships' [provide little guidance](#) on how to engage with these new powers. More generally, the position of the EU in the international system needs to be addressed. Is the EU aiming to be a 'non-aligned' broker between powers, a close partner to one certain power, or a more-or-less autonomous power on an equal footing with others?

Is the EU ready to take responsibility for its neighbourhood? And beyond? Now that the US is 'rebalancing' towards the Pacific and reducing its involvement in Europe, the responsibility for security in the European neighbourhood increasingly falls to the EU. The cavalry will not always be coming over the hill, as US officials made clear in the aftermath of operations against Libya. Most security challenges are of a comprehensive nature: political instability, violent conflict, extremism and terrorism, organized crime and humanitarian crises. The EU is due to its comprehensiveness theoretically well suited to address these issues. In practice, coordination of policies is lacking. Security is an important commodity beyond the borders of Europe, where states that have to contend with aspiring regional powers and unstable regimes in their neighbourhood, as well as internal security challenges. A strong security relationship opens the door for soft power influence. Alternatively, as other actors assert themselves as security providers, for example China in Africa, EU interests [will be at risk](#). The extent of the EU's commitment to security in the neighbourhood and how the EU interacts with other actors needs to be addressed. Furthermore, as the global strategic epicentre shifts towards Asia, the geographic scope of the EU needs to be clarified, especially in relation to strategic priorities and limited

capabilities.

Concluding, changes in the EU's strategic environment have made concepts of the 2003 strategy less relevant, and raises new questions about the role of the EU in international security. Given the extent of the challenges and the strained EU power position, muddling through is not an option. A coherent strategic answer is needed.

A different EU needs a different Strategy

The EU of 2003 and the EU of 2012 look markedly different. The number of Member States of the EU has grown from 15 to 27 in two enlargement rounds. This means that almost half of the current EU Members were not involved in developing the 2003 Security Strategy. In December 2009, the Lisbon Treaty entered into force and particularly the foreign, security and defence policies were subject to changes. The EU has gained a legal personality of its own with important consequences for its international 'actorness' and a whole new machinery has been created to improve the EU's coherence in foreign and security policies. EU delegations in 130 countries and the availability of its extensive resources (in areas ranging from trade, development, crisis management, diplomacy, defence, economics) makes the EU potentially well positioned to safeguard its interests internationally.

So far, this new machinery, most notably the High Representative/Vice President Catherine Ashton and her European External Action Service (EEAS), has suffered from a lack of purpose and has decreased Europe's effectiveness and visibility in foreign policy instead of enhancing it. To be fair, what Ashton and the EEAS mostly lack is clear guidance from the Council, which makes the argument for devising a renewed strategic outlook all the more relevant. Almost two years after the EEAS has been set up, it is high time its potential is used by providing it with a clear mission statement.

The 2003 strategy already noted that 'internal and external aspects of security are indissolubly linked'. Since then, it has become increasingly clear that internal security priorities as identified in the EU's [Internal Security Strategy](#) (2010), such as the prevention of criminal illegal immigration, combating organised crime and terrorism, have a clear external dimen-

sion. In the area of capability development and inter-institutional cooperation (Area of Freedom and Justice and CSDP) advances are being made to come to integration, but these processes lack the guidance of a coherent strategy. An integrated security strategy would tackle Europe's security concerns in all its aspects, it would do justice to the comprehensiveness of contemporary security challenges and the EU's broadness of tools. Nevertheless, drafting an integrated security strategy is not part of this Brief's recommendations, although it should be an aspiration. The complexity of this task in an EU that is divided by competences in the realm of internal/external and civilian and military security would halt the coming about of an urgently needed new external security strategy.

What makes identifying strategic priorities particularly urgent is that the EU is in the process of determining the budget for the 2014-2020 period. A new strategy is also needed, because it has become increasingly clear that CSDP has lost its momentum. One of the reasons for this is that the crisis management tool of CSDP is being used, more often than not, in a reactive and ad hoc way. It serves more as a substitute for policy instead of a means to a clearly defined end in a well coordinated array of EU instruments. Another enduring problem of CSDP, only exacerbated by the current financial crisis, is the shortage of usable civilian and military capabilities. Revamping the Battlegroup concept, aligning clusters of defence cooperation among Member States, and planning for the right capabilities are initiatives all set up for failure as long as the EU has not agreed on why it needs these capabilities. A new strategy should clarify the link between the EU's security ambitions – be it their internal or external aspects – and which capabilities are needed to accomplish them.

The opportunities of a renewed Strategy outweigh the potential risks

The most often heard downside of a new European Security Strategy is that the EU would end up with a less ambitious document than the ESS from 2003 and would highlight divisions among member states. It is also argued that now the EU is in an economic and financial crisis, a strategic process will only distract energy and resources from solving this crisis. Also, there is a fear that the result will be dominated too much by the negative atmosphere about the Europe-

an integration process that currently prevails.

It should be recalled that the 2003 ESS was drafted at a time when the EU was devastatingly split on the invasion of Iraq. In that particular divisive and critical period for the EU's foreign and security policy, the member states were able to close ranks, agree to disagree and to produce a strategic document. It can therefore also be argued that particularly times of crisis and uncertainty qualify for taking larger political steps. As has been noted in a paper by the [Swedish Institute of International Affairs](#) that 'crisis will be a recurring motif of the EEAS; the time is now to give the EU direction before the next crisis emerges'.

Anyhow, not addressing the various strategic outlooks of Member States will do nothing to mitigate the differences: a strategy formation process can contribute to convergence by making explicit which interests are shared, despite these differences. Moreover, the financial difficulties of member states has lamed foreign and security policy since 2008. A new strategy should reflect the realities of austerity and could mean a boost to more coherence and a guideline to the further intensification of pooling, sharing and specialization of civilian and military capacities. As it becomes clear that the member states and the EU will have more modest means for foreign and security policy, a new strategic process should avoid contributing to enlarging and renewing the 'expectations-capabilities' gap. Taking on board the financial circumstances should lead to a realistic strategy which is clear about what the EU has to offer.

But what about Ashton's complaint that she is not in need of more paper, but that the EU should live up to what it has already written down in several documents (among which is an Implementation Report from 2008)? The EU has indeed produced a plethora of documents with various kinds of substrategies.³ The purpose of a new ESS should therefore be to streamline these into a clear hierarchical structure in which the ESS is the top-level one, overarching the more detailed sub-strategies. Making clear what one's top priorities are could reinvigorate the EU as a foreign and security policy actor. For that reason, one more document is needed to facilitate the implementation of other policies and that is a new ESS.

On balance, the arguments for a new Security Strategy carry more weight than the arguments against. It could help to regain the dynamism of the EU's exter-

nal policies and counter renationalisation and de-institutionalisation tendencies. The risks are manageable as the promise of a renewed sense of purpose outweighs the EU's current bleak foreign and security policy profile.

[A new strategy must review threats, assess and prioritise, and translate them to capability needs and planning](#)

The need for strategy is clear, but what should it look like? There are different interpretations of what elements an 'updated ESS' or a 'comprehensive security strategy' should consist of or what kind of revision is needed. To focus the debate, the elements of a security strategy should therefore be defined. The starting point is the set of shared security interests that the member states can agree upon, from which significant threats and risks can be identified. The 2003 strategy, combined with the 2008 implementation report, already identifies a number of threats. Another review of threats that builds on these documents is advisable given the earlier mentioned changes in the strategic environment.⁴

The prioritisation of threats and the coherence among sub-strategies is a pressing issue, as well as the still non-existent links with specific capabilities. To that end, it would be beneficial to look at the national security strategy processes of the UK and the Netherlands, which integrate and rank a wide range of risk assessments on a scale of likelihood and impact and translate them to capability needs and planning.⁵ With the European power position under strain and limited available resources, it is important that threats and interests can be prioritised and tied to partners and capabilities needed to ensure a realistic security ambition and to maximise the capacity to influence outcomes in the long term.

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3. Such as: Proliferation of WMD (2003) External dimension of Justice (2005) Counter terrorism (2005) SALW (2005) ICT security (2006) Energy (2010) Internal security (2010).
 4. Ideally this would be a recurring foresight exercise on the EU's strategic environment, undertaken by a broad range of stakeholders from all parts of the EU.
 5. Marked by the OECD as best practice for 'all hazards' risk assessment: OECD, OECD Studies in Risk Management Innovation in Country Risk Management (2009).

The drafting process has advantages of its own: it can contribute to the awareness, transparency and visibility of the EU as a provider of security

The importance of going through the process of drafting a new security strategy should not be underestimated in terms of refocusing member states on common, longer-term goals away from ad hoc, reactive policy making. In widening the circle of debate, a new document to a larger interested public should be seriously considered. If handled well, the process could have a benign public diplomacy effect, contributing to the transparency and visibility of the EU's external policies and raising awareness as to how essential the EU is for preserving our way of life.

The inclusive process preceding the NATO Strategic Concept provides an interesting example. Analogous to NATO, the process could include a reflection phase in the Member States for a broad audience, followed by more focused discussion and the involvement of so-called elites in think-tanks, NGOs, universities, etc. The obvious instigator, stakeholder and leader of such a process should be the High Representative. Early on, she should provide a draft document which will form the basis for discussion. Without it, lessons from the implementation report teach us that the discussions tend to become unfocused. Based on the input from these earlier phases, she should draft a new document with which she could enter into negotiations with member states.

In an international environment characterised by uncertainty, it is vital to monitor and analyse the consequences of change for the EU's security. Therefore, the EEAS strategic division, in cooperation with the Council's crisis management structures, should conduct systematic biannual foresight studies. Questions that should be addressed are: what are the trends in terms of threats and challenges, what should we prepare for and are the European foreign and security policy capacities still up to date and up to the job?

To conclude, a new strategic document should not be a mere codification of practices in the foreign and security policy field. This would be very unwise considering the current stagnation and sense of crisis in the EU's foreign, security and defence field. A strategy should be forward-looking to the next ten years and should prioritize among threats, interests and [tie them](#) to the partners and capabilities needed for influencing outcomes.

Recommendations

- To remain relevant in a rapidly changing world and to respond to external as well as internal challenges, the EU should launch a strategic reflection process, culminating in a new European Security Strategy in 2013.
- A new ESS should streamline the various thematic and geographical substrategies into a clear hierarchical structure in which the ESS is the top-level one, overarching the more detailed substrategies.
- The – for the foreseeable future – tight financial circumstances require avoiding a new 'expectations-capabilities' gap by drafting a realistic strategy which is clear about what the EU has to offer.
- A new strategy should give a boost to more coherence and a guideline to the further intensification of the pooling, sharing and specialization of civilian and military capacities.
- The drafting of a new ESS should be preceded by an inclusive consultation and writing process, similar to the one leading up to NATO's Strategic Concept 2010.
- The EEAS strategic division, including a broad range of stakeholders, should conduct a biannual foresight study.
- A new European Security Strategy should be forward looking and prioritize among interests, threats, partners and tie them to the capabilities needed for influencing outcomes.

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