

# 16 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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In the field of foreign and security policy the EU lacks policy coherence and punches significantly below its weight. The *status quo* is that member states take leadership on immediate crises, leaving longer-term strategy and foresight to Brussels.

To become a more coherent international actor in foreign policy and security matters, the EU needs to first define its priorities as well as how to engage. Overall, the EU needs to reassert its role as a normative actor and promote a rules-based global system.

### A crisis of multipolarity?

The immediate foreign and security priorities for any EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) are evident: terrorism, refugees, Russia, Libya, and cybercrime. Events in the Middle East present the largest long-term challenge given the low levels of political inclusion in a region that is likely to experience high levels of violence and instability for many years.

Africa, with its many developmental and security

challenges, will also demand its share of attention given its proximity and historical relations with a number of European countries. Longer-term challenges will inevitably present themselves in Asia where potential conflict in the South China Sea and eventually competition between China and India will also demand engagement by the EU.

The key characteristics of the changing world are apparent for all to see. As the world becomes more connected and integrated (in terms of technology, trade and the media), it appears to become more brittle, with an apparent increase in the number of crises that demand rapid responses. The current sense of global drift, uncertainty and crisis is set to increase exponentially, placing inordinate pressure on politicians to ‘do something’.

Some of the current sense of crisis is merely due to the increase in transaction speed – technology is advancing rapidly and in a more flat and crowded world, our ability to react to events appears to have declined. Everything is ‘now’ and conveyed in near-real time – creating an urge to immediately (re)act.

Yet even in this age of information overload our ability to distinguish the signal from the noise (i.e. key strategic developments amongst the cacophony of data overload) continues to depend upon human judgement, experience and insight.

Diplomacy in the form of face-to-face knowledge and trust – the ability to communicate directly with leadership across divisions – during times of tension will increase in importance. A more hot, flat and crowded world needs more diplomacy than in the past.

In theory, a multipolar system which recognises that China and eventually India will rival the economic size of the EU and the US should serve as a more flexible system – a greater global shock absorber, able to take more strain and deal with greater complexity than the rigidity of bipolarity. But change is unsettling and the seismic shifts in the global balance of power that is currently being experienced as we move towards multipolarity adds to a heightened sense of turbulence and volatility.

Multipolarity is complex, messy and requires intensive political interaction, but a system where power is diffused is inherently more stable (although more complex) than a system where stability is determined by one or two dominant countries. The economic downturn of 2008 (that started with the subprime mortgage crisis in the US) and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 are good examples of the extent to which the actions and developments within a single dominant country can prove globally disruptive.

## Three major roles

Against this backdrop, the single most important strategic role of the EUGS must be to foster political support for the development of a global rules-based

system – including the strengthening of global governance institutions such as the reform of the United Nations and its Security Council. The strategic challenge here is twofold: managing the relative decline of the US and engaging with a rising China, drawing both into a global system where rules are set by legitimate institutions and not the most belligerent or richest country.

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Second, at an operational level the EU should plan to continue to promote international technical agencies. As a result

of its consultative policy development processes, the quality of EU policy frameworks on cyber-crime, terrorism, migration and the like set high standards. Technical agencies, such as EUROPOL and EUROJUST, are unparalleled in efficiency and value-added. The EU excels in carving out and operationalising common frameworks for action to include countries with different interests and priorities. These are attributes in short supply globally where the EU has a comparative advantage.

The third and most important practical role for the EUGS is to foster policy coherence and communication across the EU institutions and between EU member states. This is a thankless and time-consuming task that requires ongoing and often exhaustive engagement and explanation, but essential if the EU is to advance a common foreign and security policy.

