

08 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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The EU's 2003 Security Strategy was designed to heal relations between Europeans after a rancorous split over the Iraq war. But the chasm of understanding that forms the backdrop to today's discussions about EU strategy runs deeper than Donald Rumsfeld's split between 'old' and 'new' Europe.

The number one purpose of the new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) must thus be to try to recreate a sense of solidarity within the EU by creating a document that effectively links the two theatres to its south and the east. The 2003 strategy was an expression of the EU's universalist ambitions. It gave form to the dream of an EU with the transformative power to reshape its neighbourhood and to spread its way of working to the global stage through the twin ideas of 'conditional engagement' and 'effective multilateralism'.

But for most observers, today's EU seems like the object rather than the subject of history. Instead of exporting norms and values to its neighbours, it is receiving people fleeing their countries. It is also being forced into the position of supplicant to states like Turkey and regions like the Balkans which it was

lecturing not so long ago.

Look east – and south

First, the EU needs to rethink its eastern and southern neighbourhood policies to cope with a drastically different environment.

To the east, the post-Cold War security order is broken – and there is much disagreement over how to repair it. The EU's relationship with Russia has always been defined by a complex cocktail of history, geography and economics. Now, after the annexation of Crimea, there is a conflict between the 'New Cold Warriors' that want to remain defiant in the face of Russian aggression and engagers who are waiting for the right moment to water down sanctions.

When the Ukrainian crisis erupted, German Chancellor Angela Merkel used her leverage over other member states to foster a sense of superficial unity, but now much of this influence is being spent on the refugee issue rather than on Russia. To hold together in the long term, the EU needs to develop a strategic concept that is capacious enough to suit all

of its member states.

The model for us to follow should be the US-China relationship: a trinity of balancing, engaging and shaping behaviour through international institutions. It is crucial that the EU gets engaged here and other countries than Germany need to put forward ideas for cooperation.

Balancing must continue with sanctions, deterrence, reassurance and the pursuit of a European energy agenda.

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To the south, the waves of refugees and the Paris attacks are driving member states to resort back to a security-dominated world view. But the hard reality is that Middle Eastern geopolitics is increasingly driven from within the region – with the proxy war waged between Saudi Arabia and Iran at the core. This has now been compounded by another proxy war between Russia and the US in Syria. Unfortunately, this means that the EU finds its interests poorly served by other powers.

For that reason, Europeans will need to be more engaged with de-escalatory diplomacy across a range of regional conflicts. Different member states can use the relative closeness of their relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran to nudge them in the right direction and create openings for progress. Europe should not be taking sides in this sectarian struggle, but instead should be thinking about how to build on an Iran nuclear deal to promote broader regional engagement, and at the same time reassure and support the capacity of Gulf countries while not ‘compensating’ allies in counter-productive ways. All this will be necessary if the influx of refugees – the most important issue linked to the southern neighbourhood – is to be successfully addressed.

Diversify the toolkit

It will be impossible to (re)build European solidarity unless the EUGS process involves member states

much more than it has done so far. Unless it is anchored in a robust set of processes – possibly involving contact groups of four to five member states working up solutions in partnership with the EU institutions – the Brussels-led EU foreign policy will have little influence on how member states conduct their affairs. If this is not addressed, we will end up

with paper solutions such as the relocation of refugees, where states signed up to a target of 160,000 but only 272 have found homes.

It is also time for the EU to rethink its foreign policy toolkit. For all the talk of differentiation, the comprehensive approach and greater mutual ownership, the EU’s thinking is still very much entrenched within the paradigms of the 2003 framework. To foster stability and uphold order in other parts of the world, the EU will need to adopt a less Eurocentric approach. We need, for example, to think about how to engage with other integration projects, whether it is Turkey’s neighbourhood policy, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), or the Chinese One Belt One Road project, all of which have been strikingly absent from EU planning.

The EU also needs to think about new tools, such as sanctions, a burgeoning area of policymaking which the EU was slow to adopt. A new sanctions bureau – within a larger Economic Statecraft Directorate – could help monitor their enforcement, and develop clearer guidelines on when and how to lift, as well as impose coercive measures.

Above all, the strategy review should avoid the temptation to engage with an ever-widening scope of EU foreign policy – in preliminary discussions, the process covered all regions from Latin America to East Asia. If the EU seriously wants to take on global problems, it must first concentrate its resources on its immediate neighbourhood.

