

02 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

Philip Gordon

Senior Fellow

Council on Foreign Relations

The call for a new EU Global Strategy on foreign and security policy (EUGS) is premised on the assumption that the strategic environment has ‘changed radically’ (as the European External Action Service recently put it) since the original European Security Strategy (ESS) was published in 2003.

In fact, while the EU’s strategic environment has obviously evolved over the past 12 years, what is striking in reviewing the 2003 paper is how prescient it was. The ESS paper identified terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure, and organised crime as the main challenges the EU would face – today’s list would not be very different. In 2008, a review of the ESS confirmed the validity of this assessment, usefully adding cyber threats, energy security, and climate change – again issues that remain central in 2016.

In other words, as the EU reviews its security strategy today, what is required is less a fundamental revision of its priorities and more an emphasis on how to implement the policies called for in 2003.

A changed environment

To be sure, the global strategic environment has

evolved since 2003. Two broad sets of developments in particular seem most relevant.

The first is the growing challenge the EU faces from a more assertive Russia. In 2003, Russia was still struggling with internal change and arguably on the bumpy road towards integration with the West. As late as 2010, it was still possible to imagine a ‘reset’ with Russia that would diminish tensions and ultimately put the Cold War firmly in the past.

That outcome appears much more distant today. Since Vladimir Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012, Russia has moved in a more authoritarian direction at home and adopted a more aggressive policy abroad – most troublingly with the annexation of Crimea, armed intervention in eastern Ukraine, use of energy as a foreign policy tool, and unauthorised military overflights in northern Europe. A clear priority for the 2016 review needs to be how to maintain European solidarity and border defense against the Kremlin’s aggression.

The second major strategic change that affects European security is the mounting instability across the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring. Terrorism, regional conflict, and state failure were already identified in 2003 as priorities,

but the repercussions of the wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere are intensifying the challenges.

These phenomena are now producing unprecedented refugee flows, radicalising Muslims in Europe, destabilising neighbouring states, and fueling the growth of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The recent terrorist atrocities in Paris and the all-too-real prospect of further attacks underscore the seriousness of the threats emerging from the region.

A more coordinated EU

Correctly prioritising threats and issues, however, is only part of the challenge, and in many ways the easy part. The harder and more important part is to effectively operationalise the EU's approach. Indeed the 2003 strategy called for all the right things for the EU to be effective – more energy, means, and coordination – but delivery has been lacking.

Three priorities seem essential if the EU wants its global strategy to be more than a strategic 'wish list'.

The first is devoting additional resources for security, intelligence and defence. This is of course a familiar refrain, but that does not make it less true. The continued decline in European defense spending limits the EU's ability to contain and deter Russia or play a major role in the greater Middle East.

Similarly, it has become abundantly clear that the internal terrorist threat in Europe is vastly greater than the EU's ability to monitor and contain it. More resources would fill important gaps and potentially save many lives. Failing to provide them is a false economy because of the massive economic cost of successful terror attacks.

The second priority must be greater integration of European security and intelligence efforts. It is shocking that years after major terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid and London, European intelligence and police services are still not sharing

basic information about potential terrorists and that there is no common watch- or no-fly list.

The integration of Europe's intelligence and security services has not kept pace with the integration of its markets and the opening of its borders, a gap that must be bridged to keep Europe safe, and the European project alive.

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Finally, the EU should prioritise the coordination of defense and security policy with its most important foreign partner, the US. In 2003, US and European strategic perspectives had significantly diverged over the war in Iraq, contributing to the most severe crisis in postwar transatlantic relations.

Since then, those perspectives have once again converged, and the threats faced are similar and understood as such. Americans are no longer from Mars and Europeans no longer from Venus: neither can afford to maintain old divisions over the use of force and the relative roles of the EU and NATO.

