

09 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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Now is the right time for Brussels to release a new and ambitious EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), not only because of the major changes in ever-deteriorating global and regional environments, but also due to the challenges arising within the Union itself.

As a manifestation of ‘one voice’ in the field of foreign and security policy, the goals of the EUGS should be to reconfirm Europe’s leading position in a drastically changing world and to convince its member states and other international players that the idea of ‘more’ rather than ‘less’ Europe is still right.

Asking the right questions

To this end, the EUGS should be the product of an assessment of a number of factors: current foreign policy instruments, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), internal political dynamics, and external threats coming from the east and south – among others.

Although it is clear that an effort to balance out

these concerns has already been made in the EU’s evaluations of its environment, what bodes ill is that the EU may be stuck in – or even be addicted to – a culture of ‘crisis management’. By constantly reacting to problems, the EU is unable to develop any real capacity for strategic thinking. To a large degree, the dominance of a crisis management culture means maintaining the *status quo* by all means rather than making strategic choices in the face of systematic changes to the global and regional environments.

A serious and comprehensive EUGS ought to be able to deliver answers to the following questions.

First, what is the worst case scenario for the EU? In addition to maintaining the status quo through crisis management, is there a better approach to sustain and enhance the interests of the Union? Is there a smarter mindset to adopt in order to face current and future challenges besides traditional diplomatic and security policy frameworks built on concepts such as alliances or strategic partners etc.?

Another priority of the EUGS should be tackling ‘hybrid threats’. As this is a reality which most nations face today (albeit to varying degrees), the desire to build resilience to the phenomenon should be easily understood and accepted by the international community.

The EUGS could thereby demonstrate the EU’s willingness and ability to act as a constructive force in the international arena. Because of its culture of compromise, the EU is well placed to get others on board by balancing instant responses to threats and long-term political and financial projects to eliminate their root causes.

In order to make the EUGS comprehensive yet operable, the EU cannot ignore the reality of divergent interests among major international players. Nor can it afford to pretend that these conceptual differences are not widening. For example, the EU’s understanding of the use of force (economic or otherwise) is very different to that of neighbouring Russia. Similarly, the EU perceives terrorism differently to China. So, the real challenge for the EU is to figure out how it can try to establish a network of pragmatic global partnerships which bridge these gulfs.

Re-thinking the old habits

The development of a ‘hybrid model’ in Brussels with a mixture of multilateral and big power-coordination mechanisms would strengthen any EUGS. The EU should also be confident of its dominant role in climate change, cybersecurity and other soft issues. At the same time, the EU’s inability to deal with hard security threats could be mitigated if the EU is able to fully exert its (unused) diplomatic influence as a mediator and major economic player.

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The nuclear agreement with Iran saw the EU successfully coordinate major powers to strike a deal on a contentious issue. If regional, historic and cultural differences can be taken into account in this case, why not elsewhere?

It makes no sense to be idle or just complain about the worsening environment. After all, it should not be forgotten that

the EU has made enormous progress since 2003. If Europe is able to find a better path to integration and adapt to internal changes, no amount of external threats could defeat it.

According to ancient Chinese medicine, external symptoms often indicate an internal, even psychological problem. Consequently, relying on purely external treatments is not only useless, but may also worsen the condition. First and foremost, therefore, the EUGS must address the Union’s inner malaise before power can be projected elsewhere.

