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EUROPE'S STRATEGIC CACOPHONY

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SUMMARY

Europe's defence ambitions are crippled by the lack of a common strategic outlook. Most EU member states have a national security strategy; but most of these documents are incoherent, derivative, devoid of the sense of a common European geostrategic situation, and often long out-of-date. Yet Brussels continues to shun any elaboration or revision of the ten-year-old European Security Strategy. So the essential conceptual framework that should guide priorities in foreign and security policy, and the allocation of defence resources, is missing at both the European and, with some few honourable exceptions, the national levels. As a result of this strategic myopia and cacophony, defence budget cuts are being taken in an uncoordinated way that will have far-reaching consequences for European defence capabilities.

When the European Council discusses defence in December, President Herman Van Rompuy should recommend some bold steps to help make "pooling and sharing" a reality: a European "defence semester" and integrative projects such as common policing of Europe's airspace. Ultimately, however, the European defence project is not going to work unless the 27 member states, or at any rate the bulk of them, can get themselves onto the same geostrategic page. The European Council should therefore build on the growing intellectual momentum that is developing and launch a shared EU exercise to define a new strategy for Europe in the world.

The crisis in Mali once again exposed the hollowness of Europe's military pretensions. The crisis might almost have been designed as the long-sought opportunity for the EU to deploy one of its battle groups – which occupy a place of honour in the Lisbon Treaty as the epitome and acid test of European defence co-operation. The French/German/Polish battle group was on stand-by. The United Nations and the broader international community were unanimous on the need for military intervention. Yet so divorced has talk of European defence become from any practical application in the real world that the option of despatching the battle group seems to have been discounted without any real consideration, and the job was left to France. Part of the reason for this divorce is simply the lack of a shared strategic culture in Europe.

This brief is based on an examination of all 27 national security strategies carried out for the Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire (IRSEM), a department of the French defence ministry. The initial product of this investigation is available in a report entitled *Étude comparative des livres blancs des 27 États membres de l'UE*, published in 2012.¹ It took stock of the main principles of the countries' defence policies, established the key documents they rely on, and assessed their viability. It found that,

¹ Olivier de France and Nick Witney, *Étude comparative des livres blancs des 27 États membres de l'UE : pour la définition d'un cadre européen*, Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire, available at <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/185008/2037037/file/Etude%2018-2012.pdf>.

though there are some honourable exceptions, most member states' national defence and security strategies are not fit for purpose – that is, to ensure that specific national security decisions, and especially decisions about the allocation of defence resources, are taken in the light of a coherent strategic vision.

The brief focuses on the implications for Europe of this strategic deficit and lack of common vision. As a result of strategic myopia and cacophony, defence budget cuts are being taken in an uncoordinated way that could have disastrous long-term consequences for European defence capabilities. When the European Council discusses defence in December, President Herman Van Rompuy should recommend some bold steps to help make a reality out of “pooling and sharing”, such as a European “defence semester” and integrative projects such as common policing of Europe’s airspace. But because greater coherence and interdependence on defence among European states ultimately depend upon a closer alignment of their strategic world views, Europe must also define a global strategy – that is, to decide what it wants to be in the world and work out ways to match the means at its disposal (including its defence capabilities) to those ends.

A loss of common purpose and shared ambition

In the last ten years, the EU has lost the sense of common purpose and shared ambition that marked the start of the European defence enterprise. In 2003, Britain and France jointly proposed “a new initiative for the EU to focus on the development of its rapid reaction capabilities”.² Within days of this Franco-British summit, which launched the idea of battle groups, EU heads of state met in Brussels to endorse the very first European Security Strategy (ESS) – a document that announced that “Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security”, and declared that “We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention”.³ Ten years on, with “Germany’s refusal to join foreign deployments [...] undermining faith in Berlin’s reliability”, as *Spiegel* put it, and the UK eyeing the EU exit, such declarations now do more to embarrass than inspire.⁴

Europe’s failure to develop a shared strategic culture has not just undermined its ambition to be a more credible and effective actor, and therefore one that carries greater political weight, on the international scene – it has also hamstrung its efforts to maintain its defence capabilities in the wake of the financial crisis gripping the continent.

European leaders solemnly aver that they will compensate for falling defence budgets by “pooling and sharing” – and then shape their forward plans without cross-reference or consultation. They underline the need to protect the continent’s defence technological and industrial base – and then block the mergers that industry needs to survive, and eviscerate spending on research.⁵ Manifestly, most European governments are simply not serious about defence, or about doing more together.

Things are unlikely to get better without a renewed effort by Europe’s leaders to work out a joint strategy: a shared reassessment of what is going on in the world around them, and where and how Europeans should be acting together if they want a continued role in shaping global developments. The European Parliament has repeatedly insisted on the need for a “White Book” on European defence and there have been various academic appeals for a European “grand strategy”.⁶ In 2010, Felipe Gonzalez’s Reflection Group on the Future of the EU also argued for such a strategic stocktake.⁷ But although the Lisbon Treaty was meant to make the EU a more effective global player, Brussels continues to display a rooted aversion to formulating the strategy by which such a player might operate.

The EU has resisted such efforts with the assertion that it already has a perfectly good strategy in place in the form of the ESS, which was widely and rightly praised in its day. But even the document’s authors were uncomfortable with the title of “strategy” for what was mainly a set of operating principles for addressing the security threats of the post-Soviet world. And the ESS’s day was a decade ago – a bygone era in which the West still ran the world, the Chinese economy was less than half the size it is today, liberal interventionism had not yet learned lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan, financial and economic crisis in Europe seemed not so much improbable as inconceivable, and the US had not yet “pivoted” to Asia.

It is not just Brussels that has remained obdurate. Certainly, the EU institutions reacted with a predictable “not invented here” when, in 2008, Paris pushed to revisit the ESS. But the decisive opposition came from the British, who correctly sensed that a European strategic exercise would require them to talk about Europe, and the Germans, who equally correctly sensed a requirement to talk about Russia. Since London and Berlin were allergic to these topics, the project was dead on arrival – and was buried in the shroud of an eminently forgettable review of ESS “implementation”. Put Europeans

⁵ During a decade punctuated by repeated ministerial declarations of the importance of defence research and development (R&D), the “seed-corn of the future”, European governments, in practice, more than halved their R&D spending between 2001 and 2011 – a bigger reduction than in any other category of defence expenditure. See David J Berteau and Guy Ben-Ari et al, “European Defense Trends 2012”, Center for Strategic & International Studies, December 2012, available at <http://csis.org/publication/european-defense-trends-2012>.

⁶ Perhaps most prominent is Jolyon Howorth, in, for example, “What Europe badly needs is a ‘Grand Strategy’”, *Europe’s World*, Autumn 2009, available at http://www.europeworld.org/NewEnglish/Home_old/Article/tabid/191/ArticleType/ArticleView/ArticleID/21474/language/en-US/Default.aspx.

⁷ “Project Europe 2030: Challenges and Opportunities. A report to the European Council by the Reflection Group on the Future of the EU 2030”, May 2010, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/librairie/PDF/QC3210249ENC.pdf.

² Joint Communique, Franco-British Summit, London, 24 November 2003, available at <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Franco-British-summit-Joint.4685>.

³ “A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy”, Brussels, 12 December 2003, available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

⁴ “Merkel’s Caution: Berlin Reverts to Old Timidity on Military Missions”, *Spiegel Online*, 26 March 2013; available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/germany-becoming-more-cautious-on-military-missions-a-890931.html>.

together in a Brussels conference room and invite them to think about Europe's place in the world and how to make the best of it, and the consensus seems to be: "never again".

Fortunately, this conclusion has been rejected by an increasing number of academics and other authorities around Europe who, fed up with waiting for Brussels to initiate the necessary debate, have decided to do it themselves. The most prominent effort is that sponsored by the foreign ministers of Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden, whereby four national think tanks are collaborating (with a dozen other associated institutions across Europe) to come up with a "European Global Strategy", due for publication in early summer 2013.⁸ Another group of think tanks mobilised by Notre Europe are similarly addressing the need for the EU "to equip itself with a more integrated global strategy" under the "Think Global, Act European" banner.⁹ Other comparable efforts are also underway.

And there may even be some restored official appetite for strategic ideas in 2013. France is completing a new "Livres Blanc" exercise and, though burned by its 2008 experience, is again keen to see if some new momentum can subsequently be given to the European defence enterprise. Potentially most significant of all, the European Council has put defence on its agenda for December 2013. Though the terms in which it has done so are cautiously conservative, the dog has been shown the rabbit, and 2013 will surely see a rash of activity by those anxious to "prepare" the Council's discussion.¹⁰ All such efforts are welcome – indeed, it will take no less to address both the strategic myopia and cacophony that our study into European defence policies made so painfully clear.

Europe's 27 strategies

The EU's 27 national security strategies are a motley collection of documents. They even have a variety of names: white paper, security strategy, defence strategy, national security resolution, statement of strategy, defence policy guidelines, military doctrine, and national defence law, to name but a few. This diverse nomenclature hints at the range of issues EU states engage with in their documentation – from high-level strategy to capability development, force planning and administration – and the variety of ways in which they "do" strategy.

For us it seems axiomatic that a "livre blanc", "national security strategy", or any functionally equivalent piece of documentation should have an essentially prescriptive purpose. It should serve to establish a tighter link between the "ends" of more deliberately formulated external policies and the "means" of defence capabilities. It should guide national decisions on budgeting, investment and force planning, and enable governments to determine the

optimum future size and shape of their armed forces, all within the level of resources that the country is prepared to allocate to its defence. To do this effectively, it needs to assess the future strategic environment, identifying both threats and opportunities; sketch the role the country will seek to play in it, with whom; derive from this the missions of its future armed forces; define these in terms of capabilities and levels of ambition; and finally, pin all this down to specific force structures, numbers, and equipment.

Of course, in the real world elegantly deductive processes of this kind are subverted by having to start from the wrong place, by a lack of money, and by the intrusion of myriad vested interests. But that does not alter the fundamentals: there is little point in writing interesting essays about the international scene unless you deduce actionable conclusions from them; and you are unlikely to make sensible decisions about the nuts and bolts of national security unless you properly assess the strategic context. In short, a good national security analysis needs to address the full spectrum, from geostrategy to resources.

Judged by this criterion, most of the documentation we reviewed falls short. Much of it is simply out of date. Little of it shows an interest in the rapidly evolving geostrategic situation – including the changing nature of the transatlantic security relationship. Though analysis of security risks and threats is a near-universal feature, little effort is made to relate this to defining the roles and missions of the national armed forces. (Thus it is not much use emphasising the problem of cyber-security whilst leaving unresolved the question of whether the military, or some other national authority, should have the lead responsibility for dealing with it.)

In particular, the mutualisation of capabilities is everywhere supported but without any attempt to resolve the inescapable conundrum of how much mutualisation is possible, and in what areas, without unacceptable prejudice to national autonomy. Co-operation with neighbours is often endorsed – though seldom with any clarity about scope and purpose – but commitment to pursue this on a European scale is weak or non-existent. Equally absent, except in a handful of cases, is any sense of continental interdependence – that is, of Europeans being in the same strategic boat.

Of course, not all of these deficiencies are present in all national strategy efforts. Indeed, a handful of them are very good – to the extent that they deserve the title "strategists". But the rest fall short in different ways. "Globalists" tend to concentrate more readily on shifting balances of power and general policy objectives, without, however, unpacking the operational consequences they entail. "Localists", on the other hand, are states for whom operational considerations tend to crowd out broader strategic preoccupations: they look to their borders and focus on the operational means of preserving their territorial integrity. Some states address neither means nor ends systematically. Among these, "abstentionists" might be said to have forgone strategy in security matters altogether, by culture or by conviction.

⁸ "On the European Global Strategy project, see <http://www.euglobalstrategy.eu/>.

⁹ On this project, see <http://www.eng.notre-europe.eu/011015-103-Think-Global-Act-European.html>.

¹⁰ European Council Conclusions, December 2012, §20-25, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/134353.pdf.

“Drifters”, on the other hand, are circumstantial non-strategists: past strategists whose portfolio is outdated and at odds with current realities.

Strategists

Full-out “strategists” in Europe are few and far between. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the best are France and the UK, but Finland, Sweden, and the Czech Republic might also fit this description. The 2008 French white paper provides a helpful model insofar as it establishes a clear link between high-level guidance and the allocation of defence resources further down the line. The document opens with a broad assessment of recent geostrategic trends – the decline of Western actors, the power shift to the east, strategic uncertainty, and the growing role of non-state actors. It takes stock of the shifting strategic context, identifies risks, threats and opportunities, and attempts to infer the requisite foreign policy aims and determine how the country’s armed forces are likely to best fulfil them. Such a process allows high-level aims to follow through to operational recommendations. The big question mark over France’s 2008 strategy, however, is whether it remains affordable – an issue with which the 2012/2013 revision is grappling.

The UK’s strategic thinking runs along the same lines, although the link between ends and means appears perhaps less clearly. Britain’s defence review was praised for identifying cyber security and terrorism as the two main threats to national security, but criticised for prescribing aircraft carriers as the remedy.¹¹ Nonetheless, the document lays out the country’s sense of its role on the global stage and articulates a foreign policy vision it seeks to implement. The UK’s national security strategy speaks of the country’s “distinctive role in the world” and assumes it will “continue to play an active and engaged role in shaping global change.”¹² Britain will therefore strive to promote its values and its strategic interests on the international scene when and where it can: “we should look to our existing areas of comparative advantage [...]. We can and will invest in all those areas where we are relatively stronger than other countries.”¹³

As the distinction between domestic and external security progressively fades, so also does the necessity of protecting and promoting strategic interests “in the round” become more pressing.¹⁴ As the French document puts it, “The traditional

distinction between internal and external security is no longer relevant. This continuity has now acquired a strategic dimension and France and Europe must [...] define overarching strategies integrating all the different dimensions of security into a single approach.”¹⁵ Britain and France’s keen idea of their role in the world comes with a sharper sense of how their armed forces might sustain it. Both states still aim to retain a capacity for autonomous action, a full gamut of defence capabilities, and an ability to project force outside national borders where necessary.

Other European states are also equipped with thorough security strategies – albeit not necessarily underpinned by a full panoply of military means and a grand strategy in the round. The Czech document undertakes a detailed assessment of the wider strategic context, formulates national strategic objectives, and tailors the roles and missions of the armed forces accordingly.¹⁶ It goes on to address capability development, industrial policy, defence markets, budget projections, human resources, and force planning in systematic fashion.

Despite (or perhaps because of) a tradition of political neutrality, Sweden and Finland are likewise endowed with consistent and extensive strategies. The Finnish document broadens the lens to include an assessment of the EU’s relationship with international players, such as NATO, the UN, the African Union, the Balkans, Turkey, Ukraine, and the Eastern neighbourhood.¹⁷ It conceives of the EU as a strategic actor in its own right and assesses its role in the world accordingly. It mentions EU enlargement and neighbourhood policy, the Barcelona process and the Union for the Mediterranean, as well as the so-called Northern Dimension – “common policy involving the European Union, Russia, Norway and Iceland [...] aims to promote economic well-being and security in Northern Europe.”¹⁸

The Swedish strategy is notable for its candid assessment of the regional context and of Russia’s role within it: “The political developments in Russia are taking on increasingly clear authoritarian traits, with elements of corruption, curtailment of civil society independence and rising nationalism. [...] It is nationalism that characterises decision-making in Moscow. Russia has in recent years made every effort to regain its superpower role in the global geopolitical scene [...] and with all available means, including military”.¹⁹ Beyond this, both Nordic documents address the two ends of the strategic spectrum – from geostrategy to capability systems, procurement, industry and markets, and research and development (R&D) – in such a way that high-level guidance is allowed to trickle down to specific decisions about means.

11 *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty, The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, 2010, p. 41, available at http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191634.pdf.

12 *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty, The National Security Strategy*, 2010, p. 21, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf (hereafter, British National Security Strategy, 2010).

13 British National Security Strategy, 2010, pp. 21–22.

14 “Terrorism targets the territories of European countries from many points around the world while seeking to infiltrate French and European society. Organised crime exploits the benefits of globalisation and the weakening of frontiers. Energy security is no longer conceivable other than on a global scale. The vulnerability of information systems knows neither territories nor frontiers. The same goes for natural and health risks”, *The White Paper on Defence and National Security*, 2008, p. 55, available at http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/france_english2008.pdf (hereafter, French White Paper on Defence and National Security, 2008).

15 French White Paper on Defence and National Security, 2008.

16 Czech White Paper on Defence, 2011, available at <http://www.army.cz/ministry-of-defence/newsroom/news/the-white-paper-on-defence-2011-63155/>.

17 Security and Defence Policy, 2009, p.35, available at <http://vnk.fi/julkaisukansio/2009/j11-turvallisuus-j12-sakerhets-j13-finnish/pdf/en.pdf> (hereafter, Finnish Security and Defence Policy, 2009).

18 Finnish Security and Defence Policy, 2009, p. 28.

19 A Functional Defence, Swedish Government Bill, 2009, pp. 23–24, available at <http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/12/31/54/0002c3f6.pdf>.

Globalists

As the Spanish strategy illustrates, the “globalist” approach tends to lay the emphasis on the higher end of the strategic spectrum.²⁰ Spain’s document very much focuses on geostrategic issues, as opposed to operational ones. It breaks down the main international trends by means of an elaborate conceptual toolbox that identifies “risk multipliers” (globalisation, demographic asymmetry, poverty, inequality, climate change, technology, and extremism) and separates out threats into “domains”: sea, air, land, space, cyberspace, and the information space. It then proceeds to tailor external policy objectives to each of these domains. The Dutch strategy likewise uses a sophisticated method to assess the shifts in the geostrategic environment: its multifactor approach separates out strategic foresight, mid-term analysis, risk assessment, short-term horizon scanning, and strategic planning.²¹

Both Dutch and Spanish strategies launch in places into wholly theoretical discussions about concepts and values. The Spanish strategy affirms it “supports the principle of Responsibility to Protect, approved at the UN World Summit in 2005, which establishes the collective responsibility of the international community to protect populations whose own States fail to do so in extreme cases of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity.”²² The Dutch strategy discusses the democratic ethos: “Equal treatment and the prohibition of discrimination; freedom of religion and belief; freedom of expression; freedom of association, meeting and demonstration; respect for privacy; integrity of the person. A number of social values that are necessary for a properly functioning democratic state also fall under the core values. Think of, *inter alia*, truthfulness, empathy and sympathy for others, respect for the opinion of others, and willingness to modify one’s own opinion, but think also of social skills such as flexibility, responsiveness and sense of responsibility, a certain pragmatism, and being able to bear uncertainty and ambivalences.”²³

It would not be outlandish to assume that such lofty considerations played little part in recent operational decisions by the Dutch to renounce main battle tanks entirely – a sign that, for all its sophistication, the Dutch strategy remains altogether descriptive. Pointedly bypassing topics like armament programmes or force planning hardly allows

high-level analysis to follow through to actual decisions about the armed forces. In consequence, the Dutch tank decision took their allies by surprise.

While the Spanish and Dutch documents at least feature a measure of innovative analysis, strategic thinking amongst other “globalists” is less original and more derivative. The assessment of the international environment, for example, tends to fall back onto the stock list of risks and threats that features in extant EU, NATO and UN documents. Germany’s policy document accordingly opens with the following inventory: “Today, risks and threats are emerging above all from failing and failed states, acts of international terrorism, terrorist regimes and dictatorships, turmoil when these break up, criminal networks, climatic and natural disasters, from migration developments, from the scarcity of or shortages in the supply of natural resources and raw materials, from epidemics and pandemics, as well as from possible threats to critical infrastructure such as information technology.”²⁴ The remainder of Germany’s document, though clear and well written, altogether sidesteps the issue of how to apply national armed forces to the threats it identifies upfront.

The Hungarian and Slovenian strategies as a whole also revolve around this staple catalogue of risks and threats.²⁵ When it comes to how exactly to respond to them however, the analysis becomes more formulaic. The Hungarian document, having identified cyber security as a vital national security concern, goes on to give an entirely evasive account of the response required: “It is a primary task to systematically identify and prioritise actual or potential threats and risks in cyberspace, to strengthen governmental coordination, to increase societal awareness, and to capitalise on opportunities provided by international cooperation. In addition to strengthening the protection of the critical national information infrastructure, Hungary strives to enhance the security of information systems and to participate in the development of appropriate levels of cyber defence.”²⁶ There appears to be little point in emphasising how crippling such threats might be without going on to establish how to address them in organisational terms. And yet, virtually nowhere in the European compendium of documents is there a discussion of the required division of labour between armed forces and other relevant national authorities to respond to such threats. Referring back to abstract concepts or toothless EU guidance is one way of

²⁰ Spanish Security Strategy, 2011, available at <http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/nr/rdonlyres/ef784340-ab29-4dfc-8a4b-206339a29bed/0/spanishsecuritystrategy.pdf> (hereafter, Spanish Security Strategy 2011).

²¹ *National Security: Strategy and Work Programme*, 2007, available at <http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Netherlands-2007-2008.pdf>, (hereafter, Dutch National Security: Strategy and Work Programme, 2007). See also, *Future Policy Survey*, Dutch Ministry of Defence, 2010, available at <http://www.derijter.net/uk/?p=1495>. The Defence White Paper dates back to 2000 and the country’s military doctrine, entitled *Defence Doctrine*, to 2005. The Dutch strategy goes on to distinguish between strategic scenarios (multipolarity, fragmentation, multilateral, network) and strategic shocks (demography, economy, technology, social, ecology, political, security). It breaks down the national response according to a number of strategic functions (anticipation, protection, deterrence, normalisation, prevention, stabilisation, intervention).

²² Spanish Security Strategy, 2011, p. 20.

²³ Dutch National Security: Strategy and Work Programme, 2007, p. 17.

²⁴ Germany, Defence Policy Guidelines, 2010, p. 1.

²⁵ Hungary’s National Security Strategy, 2012, available at <http://www.kormany.hu/download/4/32/b0000/National%20Security%20Strategy.pdf> (hereafter, Hungary’s National Security Strategy, 2012). Resolution on the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia, 2010, available at <http://sova.gov.si/en/media/resolution.pdf>. The Hungarian strategy discusses the following risks and threats: Regional conflicts (§27), Proliferation (§28), Terrorism (§29), Financial security (§30), Cyber security (§31), Energy security (§32), Climate change (§33), Natural and industrial disasters (§34), Organised crime (§35), Drug trafficking (§36), and Migration (§37). The Slovenian strategy discusses the following risks and threats: Climate change, Financial risks, Regional conflicts (§4.1.), Terrorism, Proliferation, Organised crime, Illegal immigration, Cyber threats (§4.2.), Public safety, Natural and other disasters, Scarcity of natural resources and degradation of environment, and Medical and epidemiological threats (§4.3.).

²⁶ Hungary’s National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 13.

steering clear of these thornier issues.²⁷ In short, globalists are more inclined to describe things as they are than stipulate why and how things should be changed to reflect strategic objectives.

Localists

“Localists”, not unlike globalists, adopt a piecemeal approach to strategy that concentrates chiefly on one end of the strategic spectrum. But where globalists look to broader ends, localists focus on means. Their main concern is with preserving territorial integrity in the face of a shifting regional environment, within which Russia is cited alternatively as a threat and a potential partner. For example, the Latvian strategy states: “Promotion of cooperation with the Russian Federation is a security and stability strengthening aspect of the Baltic Sea region. It is within the interests of Latvia to promote the principle of openness and mutual trust in the dialogue with the Russian Federation in bilateral contacts, and at the levels of the OSCE, EU and NATO.”²⁸

The apparent insistence on the lack of conventional military threat is offset by repeated references to the subversion of state stability.²⁹ The Bulgarian document goes to great lengths to stress the “absence of immediate military threats” to national sovereignty and says that the probability of being drawn into a conflict is “negligible” – and then proceeds in the main to extensively discuss security on its eastern and southern flanks.³⁰ Likewise, strategic thinking in the Danish document revolves around the regional context – mainly the situation in the Arctic and its potential consequences for the Danish forces.³¹ But there is otherwise little place for geostrategy; indeed, the remainder of the Danish strategy focuses most thoroughly on operational issues. Perhaps surprisingly, Poland’s defence strategy also forgoes high-level strategy. Perhaps surprisingly, Poland’s defence strategy also forgoes high-level strategy. Despite a rapid foray into most recent strategic trends and risks, it deals mostly with the organisation of the state’s defence system and the issue of territorial invasion.³² Indeed it brings up matters that may seem altogether peripheral to national defence, such as compulsory training in citizen martial arts for the Polish population.³³

Where localists’ strategy goes beyond the parochial or the regional, it remains derivative. Many documents contain token or stilted pieces of analysis. The Romanian document is entitled *The National Security of Romania: The European Romania, the Euro-Atlantic Romania. For a Better Life in a Democratic, Safer and More Prosperous Country*. As this suggests, it is not inclined to delve into particulars and makes for fairly soporific reading. The emphasis it puts on a community of shared values and on Romania’s place inside the “euro-Atlantic” space sounds arch: “To achieve its rightful interests, in its position as an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic civilization and an active participant in the process of building the new Europe, Romania [is] [...] firmly committed to the process of moral reconstruction, institutional modernization and civic awareness, in full agreement with its own fundamental values and with the European and Euro-Atlantic values”.³⁴

In effect, most Baltic and Eastern European countries simply resort to recycling accepted NATO or EU wisdom. Slovakian, Bulgarian, or Polish strategies start off by dutifully ticking off a standard list of “new” risks and threats. For example, the Slovakian strategy mentions “the threat of terrorist attacks, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, organized crime, the growing potential for the misuse of cybernetic space, [...] and an increasing potential for the development of unexpected crisis situations.”³⁵ They then pointedly shift to matters of territorial defence implications for the state defence system and wholly different concerns such as conscription, pastoral care, defence sustainability and health services.

Any broader strategic thinking amongst localists usually refers back to NATO or the United States. Latvia’s strategy declares that the US is “the most important strategic partner for Latvia, is essential in providing security for Latvia and the entire region [...] and will remain the key strategic partner of Latvia in the field of defence and military matters.”³⁶ Denmark’s strategy says that “in a strategic perspective Denmark’s sovereignty is secured through NATO’s Article 5 commitment to collective defence of Alliance territory. At the same time, NATO provides a framework for the participation of the Danish Armed Forces in international missions.”³⁷ Most military planning is undertaken in strict accordance with NATO defence planning cycles. Estonia’s strategy says that “NATO methodologies are used to

²⁷ “Respect for cultural diversity is also seen by Hungary as a security policy consideration. Successfully ensuring the traditional coexistence of different cultures and the preservation of diversity and the identity of the communities – as the recognition and protection of common values – is one of the key elements of creating long-term stability both in the world and in Hungary’s immediate neighbourhood.” See Hungary’s National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 9.

²⁸ Latvia’s State Defence Concept, 2012, p. 17, available at http://www.mod.gov.lv/Par_aizsardzibas_nozari/Politikas_planosana/Koncepcijas/~media/AM/Par_aizsardzibas_nozari/Plani,%20koncepcijas/2012_va_EN.ashx (hereafter, Latvia’s State Defence Concept, 2012).

²⁹ See Estonia’s National Defence Strategy, 2011, p. 10, available at http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/files/kmin/img/files/KM_riigikaitse_strateegia_eng%282%29.pdf (hereafter, Estonia’s National Defence Strategy, 2011). Latvia’s State Defence Concept, 2012, p. 7; the Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland, 2009, p. 5, available at http://www.wp.mil.pl/pliki/File/English/strategia_obronnosci_eng.pdf (hereafter, Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland, 2009).

³⁰ White Paper on Defence and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2010, p. 13, available at http://www.mod.bg/en/doc/misc/20101130_WP_EN.pdf (hereafter, White Paper on Defence and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2010).

³¹ Danish Defence Agreement 2010-2014, 2009, p. 2, available at <http://www.fmn.dk/nyheder/Documents/20090716%20Samlede%20Forligstekst%202010-2014%20inkl%20bilag%20-%20english.pdf> (hereafter, Danish Defence Agreement 2010-2014, 2009).

³² Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland, 2009, p. 4.

³³ Defense Strategy of the Republic of Poland, 2009, p. 27.

³⁴ National Security Strategy of Romania, 2007, p. 4, available at http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Romania2007_English.pdf.

³⁵ Defence Strategy of the Slovak Republic, 2005, p. 3, available at http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/SlovakiaDefence_English2005.pdf.

³⁶ Latvia’s State Defence Concept, 2012, p. 6.

³⁷ Danish Defence Agreement 2010-2014, 2009, p. 1.

determine defence expenditures.”³⁸ This tends to cause inflation in strategic reviews and sub-strategies.³⁹

Meanwhile, references to the EU are few and far between. Where the EU features, it is either as a complement or a subordinate to NATO. For example, the Latvian strategy says that “the strengthening of the European military capabilities must contribute to NATO’s military capacity” – a trait that is shared by most of the strategic corpus.⁴⁰

Collective undertakings are found wanting where they fail to tie in with local concerns (mainly territorial). The EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) efforts come up short in this respect. According to the Latvian strategy, “The Lisbon Treaty’s mutual assistance clause (Article 42.7 of the Treaty) specifies that in the event of an armed aggression, the EU Member States are obliged to provide the victim state with aid and assistance by all means at their disposal. This clause has the role of promoting political solidarity, but the Lisbon Treaty does not provide a mechanism for its implementation. Therefore, it is important for Latvia to maintain a maximum degree of national competence in the decision-making regarding the EU security and defence policy issues.”⁴¹

The EU’s pooling and sharing efforts are dismissed on the same count: “The most effective solutions for maintaining and developing military capabilities are being sought in NATO. In view of the Allies’ cooperation on pooling and sharing of military capabilities, the capabilities needed for the Alliance become more cost-efficient and available.”⁴² The geostrategic outlook often comes across as more decidedly pragmatic: “the immediate objective is a sharp and visible increase of efficiency and effectiveness in spending Bulgarian taxpayers’ money, for example by taking advantage of our membership in NATO and the European Union, which provide opportunities for sharing defence costs as well as significantly improving their effectiveness.”⁴³

³⁸ “Estonia’s National Defence Strategy, 2011, p. 10.

³⁹ Formulation of Latvia’s national strategy spans a dozen publications; each fulfils a different purpose in a scrupulously organised portfolio. It relies on two high-level strategy documents: The State Defence Concept (2012), which stems from an annual Military Threat Analysis, and the National Security Concept (2011), which stems from the annual State Risk Analysis. These two high-level documents beget a number of sub-strategies, “sectoral” strategies, operational guidance and military programming documents: The National Security Plan, The National Defence Plan, The National Defence Operational Plan, The National Armed Forces Development Plan and The National Armed Forces Annual Plan. In the same way, Hungary possesses a multiplicity of sectoral strategies that branch out from its national security strategy. They deal with criminality, financial security, human resources, cybersecurity, natural disasters, environmental security, and the fighting terrorism. See Hungary’s National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Latvia’s State Defence Concept, 2012, p. 14. Dutch, British, Czech, Hungarian, Slovenian, and German documents also feature such a preference in some way or another.

⁴¹ Latvia’s State Defence Concept, 2012, p. 14.

⁴² Latvia’s State Defence Concept, 2012, p. 14.

⁴³ White Paper on Defence and the Armed forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2010, p. 56.

Abstentionists

Whether out of conviction (“abstentionists”) or circumstance (“drifters”), some European states appear to have largely forgone strategic thinking in matters of security. It is first worth noting that not all countries feel the need to commit their defence and security policies to one solemn, overarching document. A number of papers, in fact, bear very little resemblance to security strategies at all. Belgian and Luxembourgian official documentation boils down to a body of statements made by defence ministers over the years and a number of defence laws.⁴⁴ Strategic defence planning will therefore be carried out on the basis of an assortment of disparate documents. Where there is one official, synthetic document, it is often informal or exceedingly parochial. For example, while the Irish security strategy addresses the question of fisheries at length, it fails to touch upon more fundamental matters like defence planning.⁴⁵

The issue is compounded by the different institutional setups that exist at the national level. Not all EU states possess fully-fledged defence administrations: Austria, Malta, and Luxembourg do not have ministries whose sole official remit is defence. A lack of consensus, therefore, extends not merely to what form national strategies should take, but also to how they sit with the country’s defence planning system. These national setups also affect the weight and function of a country’s strategic portfolio.⁴⁶

Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Portugal do not even deem their strategic documents of sufficient significance to merit translation into English.⁴⁷ This obviously hinders dissemination and precludes debate amongst Europeans.

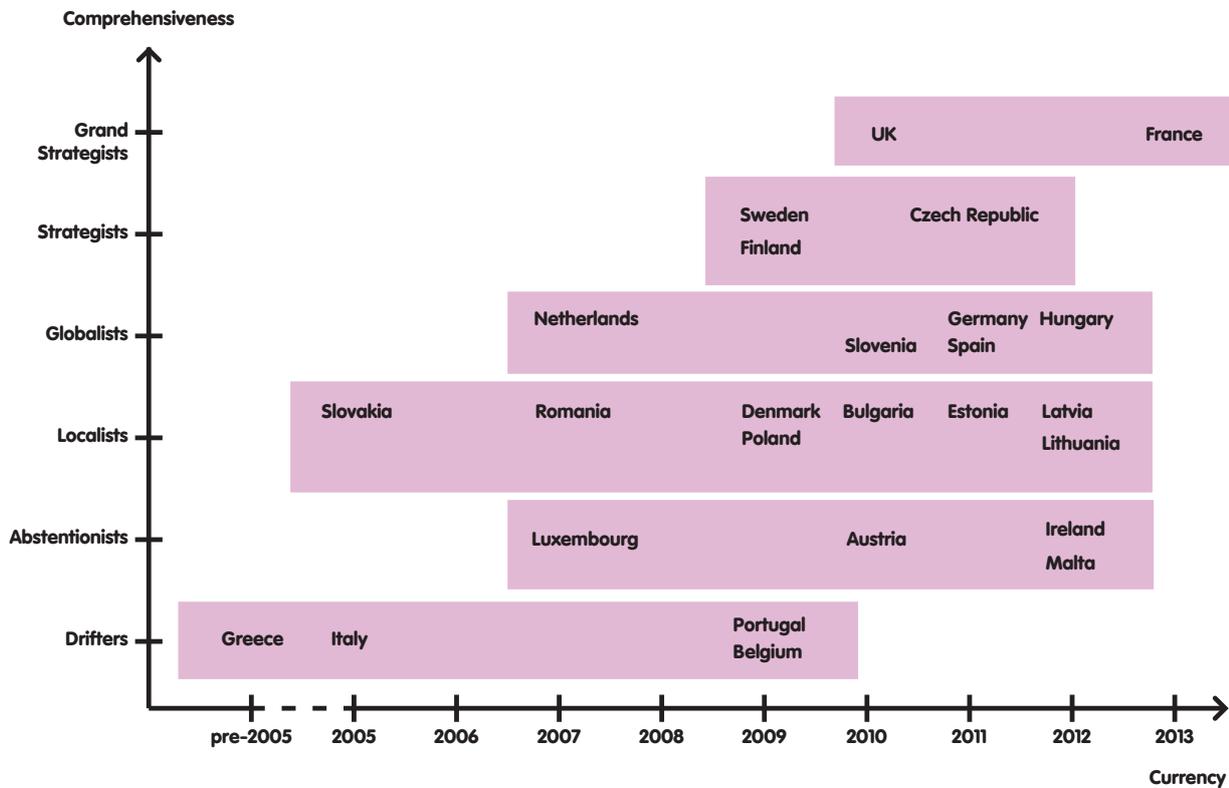
⁴⁴ The Belgian white paper dates back to 1994. An operational document entitled *Modernisation Plan of the Belgian Armed Forces 2000-2015* was published in 2000. The main strategic documents today however are ministerial statements: *Vision future de la Défense* (2003), *Plan directeur de la Défense – Plan de transition* (2003), *Finalisation de la Transformation* (2009), *Note d’Orientation Politique* (2008), and *Déclaration de Politique Générale* (2011). Luxembourg’s national strategy relies on the annual *Rapport d’activité* and *Déclaration de Politique Etrangère* from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the following laws: *Loi du 16 décembre 1997 concernant la programmation financière militaire*, *Loi du 21 décembre 2007 portant autorisation de dépenses d’investissement dans des capacités et moyens militaires*, *Loi du 21 décembre 2007 concernant l’organisation militaire*.

⁴⁵ Ireland’s Statement of Strategy 2011-2014, 2012, p. 7, available at <http://www.dfa.ie/uploads/documents/dfat%20statement%20of%20strategy%202011-2014.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Germany, which boasts a comparatively well-organised portfolio of strategic documents, provides a good illustration of this. The German white paper dates back to 2006. It is complemented by a strategic document entitled *Defence Policy Guidelines* (2011) and a military doctrine from 2004. Yet the import of these documents varies considerably. The white paper was drawn up under the aegis of the federal government. The policy guidelines, by contrast, were elaborated by the defence ministry for the use of the armed forces. Such guidelines naturally do not enjoy the same force as, say, the French white paper, drawn up only after extensive consultation with public and private defence actors, civil society and parliament – and setting out a number of binding conclusions.

⁴⁷ Austria, *Weißbuch des Bundesheere*, 2010; Portugal, *Lei de Defesa Nacional - Lei Orgânica n.º 1-B/2009*, 2009. The Portuguese White Paper and National Defence Strategic Concept date back respectively to 2001 and 2003.

Figure 1
European security strategies by
comprehensiveness and currency



Drifters

Nor does it help, of course, that many of these strategies are woefully out of date. Any document published before the start of the financial crisis in 2007 must safely be deemed an incoherent basis for defence planning – yet nearly half of the security strategies were in this position in 2012. Encouragingly, however, a number of documents have been updated since, in an attempt to factor in latest economic and strategic shifts – and more are on the way.⁴⁸ In fact, 2013 might yet prove something of a watershed: Cyprus, the only remaining country not yet equipped with a security strategy, is expected to complete its own in the course of the year.

Yet some countries continue to pose difficulties: in one extreme case, Greece, the last public strategy paper runs back to the twentieth century, effectively rendering the document all but useless.⁴⁹ Italy is another prime – and telling – example of strategic drifting. The most recent

Italian white paper was published in 2002 in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and exists alongside a set of equally antiquated documents.⁵⁰ Official strategic thought is currently contained only in an annual report on defence geared toward short-term allocation of defence resources.⁵¹ Italy is therefore quite simply not equipped with a document that addresses its national defence needs systematically. Its strategic portfolio leaves it without a view of the road ahead at a time of dire budget restrictions and unprecedented global change. Coming from a state that is by no means a military minnow in Europe, such a dearth of strategic vision is certainly disquieting.

Overall, then, few of the national strategies we have reviewed pass the test of comprehensiveness – that is, of linking strategic aims to operational means. And too many fail the test of currency – they are simply out of date. Such documents may still have their uses: they may prove helpful merely by dint of the democratic accountability they provide or the national

⁴⁸ Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Portugal, Ireland, Romania, France, Luxembourg, and Cyprus are expected to produce documents this year.

⁴⁹ Greece, White Paper for the Armed Forces, 1997, available at <http://www.resdal.org/Archivio/do00007e.htm>. Although updated, unclassified parts of it have been made available since.

⁵⁰ Italy: The Chief of the Italian Defence Staff Strategic Concept, 2005, available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lng=en&id=156795>. Report 2020, Choices of Foreign Policy, 2008.

⁵¹ Italy, Nota Aggiuntiva allo Stato di Previsione della Difesa.

visibility they give to security and defence matters. But they cannot be said to provide a sound basis for deployment of defence resources. Figure 1 illustrates the relative standings of European national security strategies against these important criteria of comprehensiveness and currency.

If a strategic vision amounts to a view of the road ahead, then most European defence and security establishments are driving with their eyes fixed on the rear-view mirror – which makes effective changes of speed and direction almost impossible to implement. Little wonder that most national defence planning in Europe consists of simply trying to keep the show on the road, with the smallest possible touches on the steering wheel. So, instead of moving to “pool and share” as everyone now promises, all EU member states have responded to fiscal crisis by trying to hang on to what they have always had, but less of it – and/or by chopping out particular chunks of capability, with no consultation or regard for the impact of such unilateral cuts on the European whole.

The consequences of this myopia are now well known. The inefficiency with which Europe converts its resource input (collective spending that still approaches €200 billion annually – comfortably more than Russia and China combined) into useful defence output has become a byword. Hugely over-manned military structures (substantially more men and women in uniform than in the entire US armed forces) are starved of modern equipment; in contradiction of repeated declarations of intent, investment in research and technology has been slashed. The consequences for Europe’s ability to mount and sustain a relatively modest air campaign were exposed for all to see in Libya in 2011 and again in Mali this year.

How to increase European coherence

The European Council’s plan to discuss defence at their December 2013 meeting comes not a moment too soon. The preview contained in the December 2012 Conclusions offers little hint of fresh thinking (there is the usual tired talk of the “comprehensive approach” and of “facilitating synergies”), or of an agenda worth the engagement of national leaders.⁵² But President Van Rompuy has at least reserved to himself the right to offer “recommendations”. Here are some suggestions.

A European “defence semester”

First, if 17 European governments can put their national budget planning up for scrutiny by their eurozone partners – the “European semester” – then they can certainly agree to some more systematic “mutual accounting” about

their national defence plans. Indeed, the December 2012 Conclusions suggest at least the beginnings of wisdom in this regard when they talk of “systematically considering cooperation from the outset in national defence planning by Member States”.

It takes a lot to change the direction of the ponderous defence juggernaut. Certainly, if you are serious about switching from a predominantly national to a more collaborative track, such changes will have to be planned well in advance. As the experience of recent years has confirmed, if you simply say “who has some spare money which they would be happy to put into a joint project later this year?”, the answer will invariably be a lemon. So what is needed is first of all to “share” national defence plans – that is, for each member state to tell the others how much it plans to spend on defence in coming years and where it sees the money going.

Such a process of reciprocal “show and tell” (which the European Defence Agency would be well placed to manage) would not involve putting sovereign decisions on defence “into commission” with partners, international bodies, or anyone else. But it would highlight as no other process could the extent of the waste and duplication in European defence expenditure; the size and nature of the capability gaps, present and future; the incoherence of national programmes when summed together; and, crucially, the opportunities for getting more from less by pooling efforts and resources in new co-operative projects.

Exemplary integrative projects

A “European semester” for defence would still, however, encounter the ingrained conservatism and risk-aversion of defence. So the European Council needs to shake up the system by itself demanding that blueprints be produced for one or two major, exemplary, integrative projects. Common air policing of European airspace is an obvious candidate – and something that could save hundreds of millions of euros by culling redundant combat aircraft and infrastructure across Europe. The savings could then be redeployed into a joint European Strike Force – the collective capability Europe should have had at its disposal two years ago to wage the Libyan air campaign without having to fall back on the Americans for air-tanking, reconnaissance, smart munitions and so on.

To be clear, we are not suggesting here some sort of “standing force”, funded in common and under supranational command. Rather, we propose a co-operative effort to

⁵² European Council, 13/14 December 2012, Conclusions, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/134353.pdf.

⁵³ Fleet “programmes” have to be planned years in advance to accommodate maintenance and refit; periods in home ports to allow crews to get reacquainted with loved ones; training and exercising; and of course the deployments – for example, maintaining a presence in the Gulf or the West Indies – which are the *raison d’être* of a peacetime navy. As navies shrink, so different nations will have to plan to share (take turn and turn about) on such deployments – or give some of them up altogether. In other words, if Europeans are to keep on “showing the flag” in distant waters they will increasingly have to do it co-operatively – maintaining a “European” as much as a national presence.

determine what components in what quantities (how many cruise missiles? how many reconnaissance drones?) would need to be available for Europe to “do another Libya”; to assign responsibility for the provision of the different components to different member states; and to plan a migration path from today’s unbalanced and often unusable inventories and force structures to a set of national parts that add up to an effective capability when brought together. Navies too could benefit from this approach – indeed, as they struggle to fulfil their national fleet programmes with diminishing hull numbers, European admirals are already talking about how they might better cover for each other by closer co-ordination.⁵³

“Pooling and sharing” has thus far failed because national leaders have contented themselves with blessing the principle, and then asking “the staff” for ideas. The need now is to challenge the staff by demanding not suggestions but specific plans to bring about specified changes. If there are killer objections, they must be set out and properly evaluated. For example, there is a widespread tacit assumption that a European Strike Force could never work because the Germans would have to be assigned a significant role – but could not be relied upon to turn up on the day. Certainly, there is a real confidence issue here – but rather than despairing, ways around it need to be explored. Perhaps the Bundestag might offer pre-emptive reassurance on the point. Or Germany could be assigned a non-lethal role in the force (responsibility for air tanking, say). Failing all else, some redundancy could be built back into the force’s design.

Time for a strategy

Mutual accountability over defence planning and serious exploration of a couple of major integrative projects would be important steps for the December 2013 European Council to take. Ultimately, however, the European defence “project” is not going to work unless the 27 member states, or at any rate the bulk of them, can get themselves onto the same geostrategic page. This will mean converging on some key propositions: that if Europeans are to continue to count for something in the world, then they are condemned to co-operate; that effective armed forces are among the assets they will need to deploy, as instruments of power and influence as much as for “war-fighting” purposes; and that maintaining effective armed forces will require biting the bullet of significantly greater mutual dependence.

This consensus will not materialise out of thin air. It will require a process of working through the arguments, testing the assumptions, and exploring the alternatives. A joint effort is required, in other words, to take stock of how the strategic environment has changed, and may change in future; what assets Europeans can bring to bear (not just armed forces of course) to protect their interests and values and to safeguard the security and prosperity of future generations; and how and where those assets will be best applied. In sum, the time has come for Europe to define a strategy – to decide what

it wants to be in the world and work out ways to match the means at its disposal to those ends.

By the time of this December’s European Council meeting, a good deal of material on just these themes will have been offered up by a range of European institutions and analysts. So the key trick for President Van Rompuy to take will be to exploit his right of “recommendation” to channel this intellectual momentum and ensure that it leads to a formally adopted Global Strategy for Europe. The modalities will need thought – the “group of sages” device may be needed to counteract the smothering effect of the Brussels institutions. But the essential point is simply that defence enterprises do not succeed without a strategy – and it is past time for Europe to equip itself with one.

About the authors

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