

A New European Security Strategy for 2009?

*Natividad Fernández Sola**

Theme: The European Security Strategy (ESS) was adopted by the European Council on December 12, 2003. There have been many changes in the international community since then and the time has come to consider what has been accomplished and how to achieve what remains to be done.

Summary: One of the stated priorities for the term of the French presidency of the European Union Council was to approve a new European Security Strategy (ESS). In addition to determining results, there was a need for a critical evaluation of how to accommodate both foreseeable and essential factors. Expectations have been progressively lowered and the document submitted to the European Council by the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) on December 11 is formally a report on implementation of the ESS.

Analysis: In December 2007 the European Council asked the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) to study the implementation of the European Security Strategy (ESS) and propose improvements and, if appropriate, additions to it, so that the European Council could approve the final result in December 2008. The choice of this formula –rather than the development of a new strategy or a clearly more modest update of the existing strategy– reflects the *impasse* surrounding the Treaty of Lisbon, and with it, the election of the new high representative who would be responsible for the promotion of a new ESS.

As was also the case when the 2003 ESS was prepared, a wide range of conversations and consultations have been held, involving various institutions, principally the Commission and the member states. As was the case then, the EU Institute for Security Studies has again organized a series of seminars on “European interests and strategic options” in Rome, Natolin, Helsinki and Paris. And as was also the case in 2003, there is a certain sense that democracy has been lacking in its development, although this time the member states are close partners in the process and have prepared their own contributions.

In early September the Council’s services set out the main areas for action and the criteria to be followed at the informal meeting of Foreign Affairs ministers, and on December 11 the “Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World” was presented to the European Council.¹ The European Council

* *Professor of Public International Law and Jean Monnet professor, Universidad de Zaragoza.*

¹ “Discussion Paper for the Gymnich Meeting on 5/6 September 2008 (non paper)”; “Report on the

shares the analysis contained in the Report and backs the Council's resolutions, which set new objectives to enhance and optimize European capabilities in order to continue contributing to international peace and security while increasing the security of European citizens.

The 2003 ESS

The 2003 ESS culminated the initial gestation process of the European Security Policy that began with the 1998 Franco-British summit in St. Malo and continued with establishing military capability goals by 2007, the structured development of civilian police capabilities, the rule of law, civil protection and the creation of institutions such as the EU Political and Security Committee, the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff in early 2001. All these instruments needed to be coherent with a doctrine and an operational strategy that had to be accepted by all member states.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (in a coalition with the United Kingdom) and the split among EU member states caused by this military intervention demonstrated the existence of a superstructure for a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), but also the lack of an underlying understanding of how to implement such a policy. The Convention that was then preparing the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe took proper note of the situation and introduced important new components to the EU foreign policy, beginning with the establishment of principles and objectives that would act as guidelines for the Union. The invasion and war in Iraq in 2003 also led to a very serious rupture in trans-Atlantic relations, since Europe did not give its unanimous and total support to US policy or to the unilateral decision made by the superpower.

In this tumultuous context, the ESS developed by the High Representative of the CFSP, Javier Solana, calmed relations with the US and also within the EU itself, since intra-community relations had been equally damaged. It therefore had its virtues, given the context in which it was developed and approved.

The European document is commonly compared to the US National Security Strategy that preceded it in 2002. However, since the EU does not act as a nation, its strategy cannot be compared to that of a single state or even to the strategies of its own member states. Both documents refer to similar security threats, but each has a different approach to dealing with them: unilateral action, where necessary, on the part of the United States, and effective multilateralism on the part of the EU; and worldwide or global US interests, versus essentially regional/peripheral EU interests. There is no reason for these different interests and capacities to prevent the existence of a common philosophy or common trans-Atlantic principles, even if they are called into question at times. The ESS makes the fight against international terrorism a centrepiece of European security activity, bringing it in line with US security priorities.

In these five years, the ESS has enabled the EU to use its capabilities to carry out over twenty military, police, civilian and mixed missions in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Palestine, Indonesia, Somalia and Congo. On balance, the outcomes may be considered positive if we take into account the situation from which the EU was emerging and the important but nonetheless modest goals set by the Union, given its material and political circumstances. It should be noted that the Union is authorized by the Treaty to carry out Petersberg missions in the broad sense of the term and that, in doing so, the EU shows

its inclination to use “soft power” instruments, in line with the foreign and security policy of some member states, including several neutral ones.

Despite all the ESS’s virtues in the context in which it was adopted, past experience and the current strategic circumstances suggest that member states and institutions ought to reconsider this strategy.

There are several weaknesses in the current ESS approach, among them the preference for dealing with the area immediately surrounding the EU and for the use of soft power and exclusively civilian instruments. Both of these attitudes are in conflict with the EU’s intention to become a global player with real impact on the burning issues in international politics that affect world security. However, they are understandable considering the fact that the member states have not entirely modernized their armies, despite their commitment to do so. A revitalized ESDP would be well grounded in an ESS adapted to the global threats to European and world security.

Is a new European Security Strategy necessary?

It could be affirmed that certain aspects of the geopolitical context have evolved, even though there have not been structural changes to the international system. Conflicts such as the one in the Middle East continue to cause worldwide concern, while the recent war in Georgia has demonstrated that the risk of armed conflict at Europe’s doors has not disappeared. The risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has increased, both among states and non-state players, with certain countries showing particular interest in acquiring ballistic missiles, amid increasing multilateral efforts to limit the light arms trade. And of greater medium- and long-term significance is the increase in tensions and conflicts over access to natural resources (energy, water, etc.) in a context in which climate change is becoming increasingly obvious.² In turn, shortages of energy resources and basic foodstuffs have led to a global economic crisis in which, as usual, developing countries are the biggest losers. Added to this, the inequitable distribution of the world’s wealth, resources and natural disasters has led to an increase in migratory flows, which, depending on the target countries and size of the flows, could have destabilizing effects and could affect the living standards of the general population.

While the international context provides the basis for arguments in favour of an updated ESS, so do the US National Security Strategy (NSS) updated in March 2006 and the new National Defence Strategy (NDS) passed in June 2008. Although both maintain their basic focus, there are nods to the alliance with Europe and there is an emphasis on multilateral solutions, while unilateral action is not ruled out when this is necessary for national security. However, despite this positive trend, the NSS’s over-emphasis on external threats and security in the strict sense has led the US to ignore other threats to human security and, as a result, to focus almost exclusively on military means to deal with these threats. There is a clear difference between the US concept of “Homeland Security” and the broader concept of “Human Security” held by most EU partners. This tendency is qualified in the NDS, which emphasizes the insufficiency of military force and the need to make use of resources of all kinds, including soft power, to deal with the security threats including those arising from poor governance in certain countries, shortages of natural resources exacerbated by climate change, pandemics and natural disasters.

² *Climate Change and International Security*, Paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council, S113/08, 14/III/2008.

Furthermore, while the 2003 ESS was approved, as we have mentioned, in the context of open rupture and disagreement between the US and Europe, and also within the EU itself, today these differences have eased considerably and there is a climate of understanding between both partners, with the usual differences and tensions regarding trade as well as certain disagreements on how to coordinate action in the NATO framework. The US is now calling for a more muscular ESDP, brushing aside earlier fears that this would weaken the Atlantic alliance. The clearest evidence of this change in mentality was the first explicit statement by NATO in support of European defence at the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008.

Finally, the main European governments that were most opposed to US unilateralism (and which, as a result, most provoked it) –those of Germany and France– have been replaced by others more clearly favourable to an increase in the quantity and quality of trans-Atlantic relations. For the first time in the history of trans-Atlantic relations, no European government is openly hostile to the US government, especially because of the change of administration. France has even made defence policy the centrepiece of its term in the EU presidency. At the same time, the end of the distrusted Bush administration is sure to facilitate even greater rapprochement between allies on both sides of the Atlantic. It is now generally understood in Europe that the EU cannot simply be a receiver of security, with the US as the sole supplier.

In addition to all these reasons for updating the ESS, there is also reason for concern regarding the failure to make further headway with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which requires revitalization based on the sovereign will of European states. This policy has suffered from the paralysis in the European constitution-building process which, for the moment, shows no signs of a quick recovery, given the lack of a way out of the situation produced by the Irish referendum. Without the Treaty of Lisbon, it is difficult to increase permanent structured cooperation among the states with greater military capabilities, and other formulas essential for the flexibility of a 27-member EU.

We are also witnessing the frustration of the expectations generated by the European Defence Agency (EDA) which, in practice, limits itself to verifying commitments of national capabilities and obtaining the best prices for military materiel, while ignoring its more ambitious goal of promoting joint research projects. There is also ongoing criticism of the lack of proper operational planning as well as a clear dispute over the relationship between this military planning body and NATO.

Factors to consider in the 2009 ESS

Like any security strategy, the ESS should begin by clear defining EU interests, since any document of this kind must specify how to coordinate all the resources available to achieve the desired goals. The 2003 ESS deals with EU defence and security and with the promotion of the EU's values. While the latter are quite clear, the same cannot be said of the concept of security in the ESS. Today, both doctrine and practice have evolved to include the broader concept of human security. However, while this is true, there are now more threats to human security and more resources are needed than those provided for in the 2003 document.

Second, a change is needed in terms of how threats are identified. While the essential approach may remain the same, it must be adapted to current strategic circumstances. Although terrorism, organized crime and rogue states are indeed threats, we must not overlook the present or potential threats posed by countries such as North Korea and

Iran; nor must we lack the will to deal with them jointly, preferably by diplomatic means, but without ruling out military, economic or other forms of pressure. Regarding the former, the report accepted by the European Council states the EU action guidelines, which focus on preventing radicalization and recruitment, protecting potential targets, pursuing terrorists and responding to attacks. Piracy is a sub-variety of organized crime mentioned in the report as a threat to security, given the events in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden that have led to the EU's first seagoing mission. While the report continues to identify weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) as a threat that the EU must work to prevent by devoting resources and time to the revision of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2010, it adds cyber-threats to security and the risks posed by small and light arms, cluster bombs and land mines.

Along with this, pandemics and natural disasters pose a threat to human security, very often with clear links to security threats in the most classic sense, since they generate conflicts or large population movements. Climate change and energy security are also problems that have, or may have, a broad impact on security, while also generating or sparking local armed conflict in unstable regions. All these are considered in the ESS report as new threats to European security, based on a relatively broad consensus among member states, European institutions and scientific forums. As has been mentioned, this type of threat was already included in the US National Defence Strategy in 2008. In this regard, the ESS report calls for a more interconnected energy market with diversified supplies and supply routes, with more action on this issue in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Africa, the Western Association and the Union for the Mediterranean territories, while promoting renewable energies.

Territorial integrity is a more delicate issue. In principle, it was assumed that there were no threats to territorial integrity, either for member states or nearby states. At the very least, with the expansion into Eastern Europe, the Russian invasion of Georgia and the fears expressed for other countries such as Moldavia and Ukraine, it is no longer clear that the defence of territorial integrity should not be an objective of the ESS. Nevertheless, at least these events bring Russia's return to power politics back into the spotlight, but two factors weigh against this being an issue included in the strategy. First, there is a shortage of resources and of political will for the EU to undertake the defence of territories on the basis of clauses such as article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This is precisely NATO's role, and the aforementioned countries have requested membership in it. In fact, we see that the most recent accessions to the EU have come precisely from prior accession to the Washington Treaty, making this organization the one responsible for this type of territorial defence. Furthermore, even if it were expressed in generalized terms, the inclusion of this threat would be a *de facto* labelling of Russia as a threat to European security. Considering this continental power's strategic importance and the EU's important ties with it, a cooperative and constructive approach to the Russia policy would seem to be the best option for the Union and its global interests. An explicit declaration on EU's Russia policy would be a useful and in fact essential component of European security. Conscious of the deteriorating relations with Russia, the report sets the guidelines for relations with this continental power and says they are based on respect for common values and interests and on common goals. However, this statement is too ambiguous to serve as a criterion that could unify the different national policies vis-à-vis Russia, since the absolutely essential prior political accord among member states is still a long way off at this point.

Third, the European Security Strategy should provide more details on the forms and situations in which force could be used by the Union. While Europe's preference is to give top priority to the use of civilian instruments for crisis management, it is no less true that some of the ESDP missions carried out to date have required the use of military force, and this should not be left to improvisation or to the criteria of the head of any given operation. In this regard, the ESS, while not a defence strategy –something that does not exist in Europe today– should develop explicit strategies for EU action that balances all the tools at the organization's disposal. In short, as has been correctly affirmed, the ESS should stop being *descriptive* and should become *prescriptive*. In its explanation of the political implications of security threats to Europe and the role of the EU in the world, the report submitted to the European Council proposes three lines of action aimed at: increasing European efficiency and capabilities, making a greater commitment to neighbouring countries and enhancing effective multilateralism on an ongoing basis. These are the same action guidelines already stated in the ESS, although effective multilateralism in the ESS is considered a strategic objective. In its consideration of these issues, the report stresses the main weaknesses of European foreign and security policy and calls for them to be improved. It advocates better international coordination, a more strategic approach to decision-making, top priority given to early prevention by peaceful means including poverty reduction, the coherent use of all tools at the EU's disposal, improved dialogue and mediation capacities, and flexibility in crisis response, making use of tactical groupings and civilian teams. It also stresses the importance of the United Nations and the role of NATO and regional organizations. However, it still fails to define an explicit strategy for EU interventions.

Finally, the ESS must prioritize its strategic interests and objectives. These priorities do not appear clearly in the current strategy, although a commitment to security in the regions closest to the EU is one of its key components. However, if we analyze how the ESDP is put into practice, it fits badly with the stated priorities. Of the 20 ESDP missions carried out to date, five have been in Congo, one in Indonesia and two in Palestine. While not denying the virtue and necessary of these missions, it should be made clear what strategy or criteria they are based on; otherwise, we would conclude that missions are based on agreements among member states, even if they do not correspond to EU priorities. Another possible conclusion is that it is superfluous to go on declaring this preference for the periphery of Europe since, if the EU aspires to be a global player, it cannot limit its interests to this area. Without ignoring its periphery, the EU should focus on the points of greatest interest for European security. Here we see one of the changes in the international strategic context, because the world at the end of this first decade of the century is not the same as it was five years ago, when Europe was still shaken by the impact of the Balkan wars, nor does the EU have the same resources or the same aspirations as it did then. Also, expectations were not as high then as they are today. In this regard, the report to the European Council takes a step forward by broadening its goals to include stability beyond Europe and, while it still insists that action is necessary on the European periphery (in Turkey, the Balkans, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries to the south and east of the EU, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) it also indicates the need to stabilize the Middle East, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, with express reference to supporting the neighbouring countries in Central Asia and the importance of improving relations between India and Pakistan.

At the same time, while there is continued insistence on strengthening security in our immediate area, some neighbourhood policy action plans have introduced a new interest in greater European involvement in solving conflicts and reducing instability in many of

these countries. While taking on this responsibility is a positive thing, the EU has still not studied the negative consequences of this policy on the countries surrounding us that are excluded from this privileged circle. Becoming a global player would require the Union to broaden its current focus to include human security interests beyond the countries immediately surrounding it –a clear example being Central Asian countries– while at the same time avoiding playing a role that is secondary to that of the big international players in these areas.

From a much more operational perspective and given the difficulties with EU missions, it has been deemed necessary to consider the joint planning of the civilian and military capabilities allocated to these missions. Not only are both components planned separately, creating or potentially creating inconsistencies, but civilian planning is also much more chaotic and inefficient. The 2008 report opens the door to joint planning by declaring that adequate and effective command structures and HQ capabilities are essential in order to “combine civilian and military expertise from the conception of a mission, through the planning phase and into implementation”, making it possible to unify the planning of the civilian and military components of a mission. The efforts made by the High Representative to create a new, single civilian-military structure for strategic planning are expressly supported by the European Council in its statement on the enhancement of the ESDP.³

The report continues on the current path of emphasizing the EU's contribution to a multilateral international system, as befits the Union's nature and its very essence. To accomplish this, it is essential to enhance global governance and this is where the US 2008 National Defence Strategy and the European Strategy coincide. However, the report accepted by the European Council does not focus as much on good governance in neighbouring countries or others, as on the responsibility to protect people against the most odious international crimes, in accordance with the guidelines established in the final document of the 2005 United Nations World Summit.

Finally, there is a continuation of the typically European approach to tackling threats at their source before they manifest themselves, with allusions to the fact that Europe traditionally links security, development and human security, thus reaffirming that the European crisis management model remains in place.

Conclusions: Five years after the ESS was approved, it is time to assess and update it. In fact, this would have been a good time to approve a new strategy, for the reasons explained above, but this is not being considered for now.

In this new phase and given the current international situation, the EU should make it an absolute priority to enhance an effective multilateral international system to significantly improve global governance and deal with the new security challenges. To accomplish this, the EU itself must be efficient, capable and flexible, enabling it to help make the necessary changes in the international system, such as reforming the United Nations, making the International Criminal Court more effective, restructuring the International Monetary Fund and other international financial organizations, and revamping the G-8.

³ “Declaration by the European Council on the Enhancement of the European Security and Defence Policy, Annex 2, Presidency Conclusions, 11 and 12 December 2008”, 17271/08.

A clear statement on the connection between security and development could also be a distinguishing feature of Europe's concept of security and its way of tackling global issues.

At the same time as a broader concept of security is embraced, it is reasonable to increase the list of current security threats.

The conditions and circumstances in which the EU could use each and every one of the resources and capabilities at its disposal should also be specified –military capabilities in particular– as well as guidelines for their correct, quick and coherent planning and deployment, preferably in conjunction with civilian capabilities. While the latter feature is included in the report to the European Council, this is not true of the conditions for use of EU resources. Indeed, to be worthy of being called a strategy, the ESS should provide more details on the EU's political goals aimed at ensuring the Union's interests, ignoring as much as possible diplomatic ambiguities that only reflect political disputes among member states.

Despite being called a "report", the submitted document actually updates the 2003 ESS and is therefore a document that will govern EU strategy in the coming years.

As was discussed above, based on the current text and the updates or add-ons proposed in the report, this seems more like a Grand Strategy than a security strategy *per se*, since it states the theory behind the ways of achieving security but, nonetheless, fails to clearly define the EU interests that this security and defence policy is meant to protect.

While the ESS is confirmed as a distinctive feature of the European identity, the member states do not appear to be ready to put aside their prejudices regarding European security and work together to achieve this, based on common ideas and on a harmonious strategy that is coherent with the EU's resources and goals.

Natividad Fernández Sola

Professor of Public International Law and Jean Monnet professor, Universidad de Zaragoza