

European Global Strategy in Theory and Practice: Relevance for the EU

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Introduction

A think-tank driven process is underway in Europe to generate new ideas for a European Union Global Strategy. As part of this process, the Swedish Institute of International Affairs on November 13, 2012 brought the academic community into the discussion by means of a day-long workshop titled: “European Global Strategy in Theory and Practice: Relevance for the EU” . It explored critical questions meant to inform and contextualise debate. What is ‘strategy’? What role can it, and should it, play in global politics? Does the EU need a strategy? Is the EU polity capable of fulfilling strategic ambitions? Current discussion is underpinned by different – and often competing – answers about such questions, which in turn reflect different theoretical perspectives.

The workshop pinpointed differing perspectives, and clarified assumptions to explore what can be learned from academic research on the question of strategy. The aim was to form a clear view of how theory-driven insights can enrich strategic discussions in the EU – thus providing the academic community with a unique opportunity to shape a growing political priority.

Texts from the four presenters are collated in this UI Occasional Paper, which can be read as academic input to the on-going process to form a European global strategy. More information on the project can be found on the website: www.europeanglobalstrategy.eu.

Mark Rhinard
Stockholm, February 2013

Realpolitik and Idealpolitik: Interest and identity in European foreign policy

Kjell Goldmann

I shall depart from the old distinction between Realpolitik and what may be called Idealpolitik. This is helpful for seeing what foreign policy orientation is, and is not, plausible for the European Union against the background of the euro crisis.

Before continuing I should say a word about the concept of strategy, since this is what we have been asked to consider at this meeting. Are Realpolitik and Idealpolitik strategies of foreign policy, or what are they?

A strategy in common usage is a comprehensive view of the means (the “tactics”) to be used for attaining an objective. The concept originally referred to military matters but is now used in business, in election campaigns and much else. Realpolitik and Idealpolitik are not strategies in the sense of means to an end, since both are mixes of means and ends.

Means and ends are not always easy to keep apart, however. Decision making, according to what is known as the garbage can model, is not always a matter of finding solutions to problems but may also be a matter of finding problems for your solutions. A strategy, similarly, may comprise ends to fit the means you wish to apply. This I believe is pertinent to the future of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Realpolitik is defined in strikingly different ways in the literature. A common theme, to the extent that there is one, is pragmatism and self-interest instead of ethics and ideology. But pragmatism and self-interest are not the same, nor are ethics and ideology.

Here is a list of pairs of concepts that may be taken to characterise Realpolitik in opposition to Idealpolitik.

	Realpolitik	Idealpolitik
concern	power	ethics
	national security	global change
analysis	concrete situation	abstract theory
	necessity	righteousness
method	pragmatic compromise	idealistic steadfastness
	logic of consequences	logic of appropriateness
tradition	conservatism	liberalism

It is obvious that these various dimensions do not correlate with each other and that it is possible to pursue Realpolitik in one sense without doing it in another. Yet it makes sense to think of one type of policy—or strategy, if you wish—focused on national security on the basis of the existing situation defined in terms of power, and another type guided by a broader view of politics and focused on what is right in a wider sense.

A comment may be needed on the penultimate item of the matrix. The idea of two “logics” of decision making is an analytical device created by the American economist James March and the Norwegian political scientist Johan P. Olsen. There are, they write, “on the one side” those who “see action as driven by a logic of anticipated consequences and prior preferences”—rational choice, essentially. There are, “on the other side”, those who “see action as driven by a logic of appropriateness and senses of identity”: decision makers ask themselves what action is appropriate given the norms and values inherent in the identity of their organization—a sociological or anthropological rather than an economic perspective on decision making.

It is easy to show that the “logics” are not mutually exclusive, and there are other criticisms that can be made (I have published a paper about this) but the distinction is

useful as a heuristic tool for distinguishing between decisions with an emphasis on producing consequences and decisions with an emphasis on expressing identity. The former fits the Realpolitik framework and the latter the Idealpolitik orientation.

In the theory of international relations it is assumed by so-called realists—Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer, and others—that the essence of international politics is self-interest, necessity, security and the rational consideration of alternatives. I am “realist” enough to believe that this is indeed a major feature of international politics. However, wherever you look there is Idealpolitik as well. The US is just one country in which Realpolitik and Idealpolitik are found side by side, or even hand in hand. Both are pursued by most countries. Just as it is commonplace in international politics to be guided by considerations of security and power, it is commonplace to use foreign policy to express one’s identity.

The common foreign policy of the EU may be considered against this background. We do not know to what the euro crisis will lead, but a plausible scenario is that the Union will disintegrate, either generally, as George Soros believes, or in the form of integration at varying speeds. In either case there will be a need to do what can be done to retain as much as possible of what awarded the EU the Nobel Peace Prize.

An obvious tool to be used for this purpose is the common foreign policy. There is nothing like Idealpolitik for manifesting identity, and it should be easier to form a common Idealpolitik than it is to overcome fundamental economic and financial problems.

What about a common Realpolitik? Anything is possible, but I believe that, especially in view of the euro crisis, member states will want to keep their national security policy essentially outside the EU for the next five or ten years at least. More phraseology, perhaps, but limited substance.

It is different with Idealpolitik, which risks less and offers more. To link foreign policy and European identity is an old idea in the Union, outlined already in a “Declaration on European Identity” agreed by the foreign ministers in Copenhagen in 1973, as well as in the “Solemn Declaration on European Union” of 1983. And in the Maastricht Treaty, an objective of the CFSP is said to be “the wish to affirm European identity”.

An identity-related common foreign policy may comprise four roles for the EU:

(1) *Model*. The EU has served as a model for efforts at closer cooperation in other continents, a model that has now been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It may be a function of a common foreign policy to exploit this further, even if the euro crisis is making this a less plausible idea than before.

(2) *Global reformer*. The best example so far of the EU as a determined proponent of global reform is in the area of climate change. Surely there are other issues on the global agenda where the EU could aspire to become a strong actor with a high profile.

(3) *Promoter of human rights*. A further identity-building role could be as a strong and reliable defender of universal human rights by means of everything from diplomacy and foreign aid to occasional military intervention. This will set the EU against superpower China, for whom non-intervention in other countries is a categorical imperative. A confrontation between Beijing and Brussels over human rights in third countries would not be bad for European identity.

(4) *Mediator in crucial conflicts*. An additional role is as mediator in difficult conflicts — maybe between Israel and the Palestinians, where a constructive approach is badly needed, and the US is suffering from the handicap of its public opinion. In order to be able to intervene constructively the EU would also have to improve its credibility on both sides, but this should be possible to do.

Nothing of this is new, all is more of the same. However, it is possible to envisage a common document outlining a meaningful global strategy for the EU by specifying what roles the EU intends to play in world politics, what material, institutional and diplomatic preparations are needed for doing this effectively, and, importantly, how this relates to what the EU thinks is special with Europe—how it expresses Europe’s special identity, so to speak.

European Global Strategy in a World of Power Transition

Jolyon Howorth

Two urgent factors underpin the quest for a new European global strategy (EGS). The first is the context of global power transition which both reflects and drives the relative decline of “the West” and the rise of “the Rest”. However long that process takes and whatever form it assumes, there is no doubt that it is happening. Adaptation may be delayed but cannot be avoided. The second is the exhaustion of the European Union’s (EU) founding narrative of “internal peace”. Young Europeans are no longer impressed by that postwar narrative and need fresh motivation in order to believe in the European project. The new narrative informing the EU’s global action should be “to facilitate and engineer a peaceful transition towards a new global order”. Academic debate offers fruitful insights into all the main questions posed by these developments.

Lessons learned from the 21st Century

Any new articulation of an EGS must begin with a lucid appraisal of the lessons to be learned from global affairs since the *European Security Strategy* document of 2003. The first lessons derive from Iraq & Afghanistan and concern the limited *usefulness* of military power in a world of complex interdependence in the “North” and growing (often fundamentalist) passions in the “South”. The century began with a “Global War on Terror” which conflated and confused a multitude of different types of *jihād*. The threat of “terrorism” needs relativizing in light of lessons learned. There is a huge academic literature on these issues.

At the same time, the “Arab Spring” has caused all global actors, but especially the Europeans (immediate neighbours of the Arab world to the North and West), to re-assess their capacity to influence the course of tectonic events and to re-examine the mix of requisite instruments. A rich seam of academic analysis has recently assessed

the real potential for EU influence in countries where accession is not on offer. At the same time, in the wake of Libya and Syria, the EU must face up squarely to the need to find the correct balance between hard and soft power resources, between civilian and military approaches to conflict resolution and crisis management. How serious is Europe about the implementation of R2P (Responsibility to Protect)? Such questions pose, quite frontally, that of deciding what sort of role military instruments should and will play in the overall toolbox of EU power resources. That question cannot be answered without a parallel re-assessment of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy's (CSDP) relations with NATO – post-Libya and post-Afghanistan.

The EU also needs to ponder the lessons of the global financial crisis: has the Washington Consensus been overtaken by some new Beijing Consensus or a BRICS consensus? As the debate around development aid appears to be overtaken by a wave of support in recipient countries for domestic-led growth as an alternative pathway to modernity, can a new European global strategy adapt to the preferences of the Global South, especially in an era marked by the advent of the rising powers as donor countries with an entirely different approach to conditionality?

Above all, perhaps, the EU needs lucidity about the consequences for Europeans of the new planetary geo-strategic focus on the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific theatre. A hypothetical EGS does not imply the same mix of instruments in all parts of the globe. A “harder mix” of instruments will be required closer to home, and the further distant the challenge the greater will be the role of diplomatic, economic and cultural leverage. As top priorities, the focus should be, above all, on: Russia and the geo-political space between the borders of Russia and the EU; the Black Sea and the Caucasus; the Mashrek (including Israel/Palestine); the Maghreb & the Mediterranean; the Sahel; the Arctic; and probably, but with a different mix of instruments, Sub-Saharan Africa. Protection of the sea-lanes from Suez to Shanghai must become an international responsibility involving close EU cooperation with other stakeholders in the provision of the global commons. Recent suggestions that

the EU might accompany the US in its “tilt” to Asia, however, should be countered. The EU needs to learn to walk before it can run.

A new institutional framework for the EGS?

Many suggestions have recently been formulated for a new overarching institutional agency to develop a hypothetical EGS. Titles proposed have included a “European Security Council”, a “Strategic Advisory Body”, an “EU Forecasting & Analytical Unit”, and a “European Defence Review Commission” – among others. It is significant that all analysts call for such a body. The precise title is less important than its institutional status and its size. It must be small (a maximum of ten members) and based on proven expertise and competence. Such an agency cannot belong to one of the existing EU bodies if it is to be genuinely innovative in its thinking. It must be totally independent from the Council, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Commission and the Parliament, while nevertheless incorporating the expertise and the interests of those bodies. One high-level representative from each of them is both necessary and sufficient. For the rest, it should comprise internationally recognized strategic thinkers from the worlds of the military, diplomacy, think-tanks, academia and civil society.

Its work should involve the drafting of three key documents. First, a brief (one paragraph) *mission statement* for the EU itself: what is the EU and what are its global objectives? Secondly, a document which will serve as the nucleus of an EGS – but bearing in mind that a “grand strategy” is not so much a document as the capacity to engage in a “a process, a constant adaptation to shifting conditions and circumstances in a world where chance, uncertainty and ambiguity dominate”¹. It is, at its simplest, “the calculated relation between means and large ends”². The new agency should pay particular attention to those “large ends” that the EU has hitherto neglected

¹ Murray, Williamson, MacGregor Knox & Alvin Bernstein (eds.) (1994), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States and War*, Cambridge University Press

² Brady-Johnson (2010), *The Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy*, Yale University: Course Objectives document.

adequately to define. The third output of this group should be an *EU White Book*, offering a viable synthesis of the relevant national strategic statements of most EU member states. Such an exercise has already been trail-blazed by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)³.

The work of this new agency must be actively and publicly supported by heads of state and government, who must finally begin to “come clean” with their respective publics about the significance and the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)/CSDP. For too long, national politicians have continued to sing from the national hymn-sheet, to trumpet the “national interest” (as implicitly or even explicitly incompatible with EU interests as a whole) and have neglected even to inform their publics that a European grand strategy is under discussion. Theses about an EU “democratic deficit” have been greatly exaggerated, and opinion poll after opinion poll reveal that the EU’s citizens intuitively consider foreign and security policy to be logically best conducted at EU level. But publics do at least need far greater information about the issues involved in an EGS, the stakes, the objectives and the means.

Formulating the essential questions

A successful EGS will involve selecting, from dozens of potential crucial issues, the most urgent questions to be addressed. The following are some key suggestions.

What is implied by multi-polarity? Will this deliver less stability and security than either bipolarity or uni-polarity? In 2009, the main theorists of international relations from the US academic profession contributed to a collective reflection on the implications for world peace and stability of *uni-polarity* and their findings were not

³ Olivier de France & Nick Witney, *Stratégies nationales de sécurité et de défense: pour une approche européenne*, Paris, ECFR, 2012

reassuring⁴. Realists have long believed that multi-polarity, especially if it is “unbalanced”, is the least stable global system. Some further analysis of these issues is crucial.

How can the emerging power transition best be managed in the interests of global peace? Political scientists and international relations scholars have theorized that major power transitions tend to be accompanied by military conflict. As the stakes currently seem to be on the rise in the South China Sea, this issue acquires huge salience, especially in the context of the US “tilt”. Scholars such as John Ikenberry have argued that the liberal international system put in place after World War Two is sufficiently strong and resilient to be able to co-opt the rising powers into its logic and institutions⁵. Others have insisted on the need for the West to strike a “global grand bargain” with the Rest in order to avoid conflict⁶. Still others, such as Charles Kupchan, envisage a global order in which, for the first time in history, no one power will exercise hegemony⁷. Any EGS will need to engage with these perspectives in order to devise a strategy for the EU.

How can the EU best defend and promote its values in a world featuring significant political-cultural diversity? While recognizing that other civilizations espouse different values, the EU should give serious thought to the most *effective* way of engaging in “values competition” without risking unnecessarily deleterious material consequences and without compromising its basic beliefs. Media-assisted scuffles around the passage through Western cities of the Olympic flame in 2008 did little for the people of Tibet and much to enflame Chinese nationalism among a younger

⁴ G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno and William C. Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, State Behavior and Systemic Consequences”, *World Politics*, 61/1, January 2009

⁵ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton University Press, 2011

⁶ Robert Hutchings & Frederick Kempe, “The Global Grand Bargain” *Foreign Policy*, November 2008

⁷ Charles Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn*, Oxford University Press, 2012

generation which had hitherto been relatively immune to it. Such activity was, in short, counter-productive. Given the limited success rate to date of efforts to leverage human rights conditionality, even in the EU's direct neighbourhood, let alone much further a-field, a radically new approach is required.

Does the EU have clearly identifiable collective interests (as opposed to a series of national interests)? How can those interests best be defined, articulated, evaluated and defended? As the 21st century moves towards its third decade, turbulence rather than stability seems to be dominant within the international system. The formulation of an EGS is urgent and overdue. The time to act is now.

An EU Global Strategy: Unnecessary and Unhelpful

Anand Menon

The European Union has no need of a global strategy. Quite the contrary. The exercise of drafting and agreeing one would be not merely unproductive, but counterproductive. Any document that all 27 member states can agree upon would be flaccid, couched in generalities, and unable to provide a guide to specific foreign policy actions. Moreover, even if drafted, a strategy would require member states to agree on measures to implement it, which again presupposes greater consensus than actually exists. Finally, not only would a strategy fail to provide the kinds of benefits its proponents claim it would, but it would serve to further weaken the Union. The proliferation of statements and declarations made in the name of the EU bear eloquent testimony to the fact that these serve as a kind of displacement activity, allowing national leaders to forego the painful reforms that real international effectiveness requires, whilst appending their signatures to grand, yet meaningless, multilateral statements of intent.

Let me be clear. I am not for a moment denying that a sound global strategy properly implemented would be a great idea. My concern is, rather, that any such strategy would be neither sound nor properly implemented. Nor are my arguments based on the assumption that EU action is not necessary. I concur with those increasingly numerous observers who argue that individual member states – and increasingly even the largest amongst them – are finding it ever more difficult to exert a real influence over international affairs when acting alone. And as the United States ‘pivots’ away from Europe, Europeans will increasingly be expected to take care of their own neighbourhood without (material) support from Washington.

This, then, is not a eurosceptic argument based on a desire to prevent the EU from acting effectively. Rather, it is an argument based on an acute sense that the EU needs to get its act together, and has to develop a capacity for effective action as soon as

possible. And nothing serves the Union worse than the production of vague documents portrayed as ‘strategic’ which are then ignored by the member states that have signed up to it.

For proponents of an EU global strategy, the purpose of such a document is to define the EU’s priority objectives, the instruments to be applied in their pursuit, and the means to be allocated to this task. This all makes sense in a normal, national, political system with both the means and the intent to deploy them. In such circumstances, strategy serves as a useful guide to external action. In the case of the EU, however, the notion of strategy as way of adjusting means to a common purpose makes far less sense, in that the Union itself possesses neither.

Here, reliance on member states for both defining objectives and providing resources comes to the fore. In terms of the former, it is hard to see how national governments can move towards greater consensus on fundamental foreign policy interests. Whilst all might agree on relatively minor issues, such as the desirability of enhancing stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (without necessarily being of one mind on the value of intervention there) this is not the case when it comes to EU relations with major powers such as Russia or China. Geography, history and politics continue to pull national foreign policies in different directions, whilst larger and smaller states inevitably differ in terms of their perception of the need for, and desirable scope of, common action. Strategy is all about priorities, and tailoring means to address these. Yet as long as national priorities differ, it is hard to see how a clear European strategy can emerge.

Nor is there much by way of empirical evidence to support the claim that the very process of drafting a common document will lead member state positions to converge. It is hardly surprising that the Union’s first stab at this kind of exercise – the European Security Strategy – whilst doubtless helping paper over the cracks revealed by Iraq, was little more than a bland statement of vague principle which suggested little if anything in the way of specific foreign policy actions. At roughly the same

time, moreover, the Political and Security Committee was preserving its reputation for consensual decision making by failing to put the issue of Iraq on its agenda.

The history of European integration is littered with examples of ambitious declarations being swiftly followed by a failure on the part of member states to act on their stipulations (remember the Lisbon Agenda?) It is all too easy for national leaders to travel to Brussels and sign ambitious documents. At a minimum, these serve as a ‘feel good’ displacement activity, giving the impression that problems are being addressed.

This disjuncture between rhetoric and action, however, is damaging. Whilst ambitious talk serves to shift attention from the real problems confronting Europeans – the lack of military capabilities is currently amongst the most pressing in terms of foreign policy ambitions – it also raises expectations about what the EU is capable of achieving. Little wonder that disillusionment sets in so quickly. Little wonder that citizens and some governments are starting to believe that effective EU international action is little more than a chimera.

Within the EU, strategic documents are too often seen as an alternative to, rather than a guide for, action. It is easy to see the attraction of statements of intent: if academics were judged on the basis of the quality and detail of their ‘to do’ lists, I would now be living off the interest generated by my Nobel prizes. Yet European leaders should avoid such temptations. Time wasted haggling over a text is time that could be spent formulating the kinds of reforms to national defence structures that might improve European military capabilities. It is the more prosaic and low key initiatives that promise to bear most fruit. Thus, member states might consider initiating greater collaboration between their defence ministries – at the very least, basic coordination over the large cuts foreseen in national defence spending might help avoid everyone cutting the same capabilities.

The problems bedeviling EU attempts to become a meaningful security actor are not of a kind that can be solved by EU fiat. Rather, member states need to act to erode the political and institutional hurdles to effective cooperation that have, to date, stymied progress towards greater pooling and sharing in the military realm. Whilst drafting a strategy might be an interesting and even enlightening exercise, it will do nothing to bring about a real improvement in the Union's disappointingly poor record in international security. Worse still, it threatens to render such an improvement a still more distant prospect.

The Internal Value of a Global Strategy Project

Eva Gross

Much of the debate surrounding a European global strategy centres on the external threats that Europe must address to preserve peace, stability and well-being across the continent. Discussions inevitably focus on the identification of interests and priorities -and the question over whether the EU has the necessary instruments and its leaders the political will necessary to effectively pursue Europe's strategic interests. Seen from this vantage point, a European global strategy is mainly about the signals any future document will send out about the EU's global ambitions and priorities – and against which any EU action will invariably be judged.

This is not to suggest that these external effects do not reflect a key purpose of the envisaged European Global Strategy. However, the near exclusive focus on its external function eclipses a second, and no less important, purpose of strategic debate, and any resulting strategic document.

An exercise in strategy formulation serves an important internal function as well: it can help forge cohesion among member states. A strategic document – and the exercise of drafting such a document – can also have a socializing effect in that it focuses attention and efforts on converging interests; the formation of, and support for, Europe's global role.

Reflecting on the genesis of the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), it was the acrimonious split over Iraq that represented a shock to EU member states that provided a major impetus for the exercise of drafting a strategy. It also highlighted the importance of the internal (rather than external) function of the ESS. Providing internal cohesion, a common narrative, and a roadmap for EU foreign policy in the aftermath of an internal crisis, continues to count as one key accomplishment of the original document.

A decade later, parameters have shifted. Internally, the EU has a larger membership base than it did a decade ago, and institutional developments through the Lisbon Treaty confront the EU with adjustment challenges as well as opportunities. This puts the focus on the internal purpose of strategy formulation once more. Drafting a strategic document serves a similar purpose as it did a decade ago – but in a context of increasing complexity.

Centrifugal forces currently acting on Europe are of a different but no less corrosive nature than those of 2003. In a context where foreign policy debates tend to take a backseat to economic concerns, and where solidarity but also member states' conceptions and commitments to the European project are contested, cohesion is as necessary as ever. It has also become more elusive.

A decade later, a big-bang enlargement, and institutional innovations following the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, all suggest that there should be an inclusive debate for reasons both of legitimacy and affirmation of strategic and foreign policy objectives member states signed up for – and brainstorming on where the European project needs to be headed if it wants to stay relevant, legitimate and effective in the realm of external policy.

Strategy will remain a largely member state-driven process. However, it also requires input from other relevant stakeholders. Internal socialization and cohesion effects are particularly important for the EEAS as a “new“ institutional member that remains in the process of consolidation.

In times of systemic change, and in an age of austerity there has been little appetite inside the EU framework for larger strategic discussions. The added value of strategic debate is not apparent for all – but sometimes viewed as privileging process over action and thus playing into the hands of EU critics by making obvious the EU's shortcomings as a foreign policy actor.

The on-going economic crisis has curtailed debate on foreign policy and European appetites for external action. Economics and the management of globalization for sustained well-being have come to rank among the EU's strategic objectives, but there also needs to be a debate over what foreign policy the EU can afford, and what priorities it should set.

A strategic debate can offset and mitigate tendencies to hide behind economic realities so as not to answer looming foreign policy questions. It can also mitigate tendencies of nationalization and navel-gazing, and serve as a reminder of the need for more solidarity and the value of the European project, but also the *sui generis* nature of the EU and its foreign policy.

To not make the effort for fear of complexity or lack of agreement shirks the strategic and external challenges that the EU currently faces.

A European global strategy project is not a panacea; however it constitutes strategic reflection that is necessary both for internal and external purposes. It could even serve as a litmus test for EU foreign policy, and its capability to adapt to changing times. Member states diverging too much to agree on common threats and interests would indicate a bigger crisis than debates currently allow for – but then the EU's problems would exceed that of a global strategy and touch on the *raison d'être* of the EU itself. And that would require a different call to action.

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