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European foreign policy since the Cold War: How ambitious, how inhibited?

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Abstract

The European Union has declared ambitious objectives for a common European foreign policy since the end of the cold war. Through successive revisions of its constitutional treaties, it has built may of the institutions that might support such a common policy. Incremental changes and adaptation through experience of successive crises have strengthened practices of cooperation and consultation. Yet the retention of sovereignty over foreign and defence policy by national governments, and the unwillingness of national governments and parliaments to engage in any EU-wide reconsideration of strategic needs and objectives has left these common institutions without the permissive consensus needed to support effective shared action. National inhibitions about subordinating particular interests and assumptions to a wider European consensus have left the EU institutions without the ability either to promote shared European interests or to act effectively when those interests are threatened.

Keywords

European Union, foreign policy, Iran, Russia, security, Ukraine

The end of the Cold War should, really, have been 'the hour of Europe'. Western Europe had experienced 40 years of democratic government, security and economic recovery and sustained growth, under American leadership and protection. The 'clear and present danger' presented by Soviet and other Warsaw Pact forces, massed along the frontiers of central Europe, shrank away, while the leaders of the new governments across east-central Europe looked to learn from Western Europe's experience and join its institutions. The Realist world of superpower confrontation, organised in two competing alliances, appeared to be giving way to an Idealist world of international cooperation and open frontiers. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had completed its task of securing Western Europe from the Soviet threat. The European Union (EU) seemed to optimists a more appropriate vehicle for the transitions to democracy that would shape this brave new world.

This article reviews the substantial institution-building in which the EU has engaged since 1990 in the field of external relations, foreign and security policy, and the much less substantial achievements of collective European diplomacy.[1] It notes the problems of authority and responsibility, in a loose confederation of states, and the resulting gap

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between ambitious declarations and collective commitment to their fulfilment. European institutions acquired a number of instruments for collective action. But national governments remained responsible for agreeing to their use, and for the supply of forces, when needed, to support diplomacy. National assumptions about foreign policy and Europe's international role and responsibilities remained diverse; without the development of an EU-wide debate on strategy or objectives, there was insufficient common ground for the EU as a whole to act. The article draws on the author's participant experience, in conferences and in government, and academic study and think-tank engagement, throughout the period under discussion.

Realism or idealism?

From the outset, competing narratives have existed about what some still call 'the European project'. On the one hand, there was the Idealist approach in which power politics and state rivalry would be replaced by peaceful integration and 'an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe'. On the other was the Realist version, in which the aim was to contain Germany by integrating its economy and government with those of France and its smaller neighbours, under watchful American supervision. Both narratives had their adherents in Paris and Washington—though the Realists had greater influence in both. The Brussels institutions held to the idealist version, as did many in Bonn (then still the capital of Germany) and the smaller European Community (EC) capitals. The German debate about foreign policy throughout the cold war was inhibited by the legacy of the Second World War, leading to a strong emphasis on soft power rather than hard, on 'normative power' and diplomatic dialogue (Manners, 2002; Youngs, 2004). Small states had strong interests in downplaying hard power, and emphasising more persuasion; it was the Luxembourg Prime Minister, as President of the EU Council of Ministers, who unwisely declared at the outset of the Bosnian crisis that 'This is the hour of Europe'. Views in London were strongly Realist, although some appreciated the practical benefits of foreign policy cooperation. Neither France nor the United Kingdom envisaged the EC collectively taking over responsibility for political or security relations with their former colonies in Africa, or playing a leading role in the turbulent politics of the Middle East. And the US Administration had no intention of allowing strategic relations with either the former Soviet bloc or the Middle East to be defined by its European allies.

Europe, in the familiar phrase of European Commissioners and others, saw itself as 'a civilian power' (Duchêne, 1973; see also Bull, 1982). NATO had managed and defined hard power: deterrence and defence. The European Community (EC, as it then was) dealt with soft power, exercised by, for example, trade concessions and economic assistance: 'the power of attraction' as against the power of denial. Nested within the Atlantic Alliance, European policy-makers—Brussels insiders and enthusiasts for further integration above all—had the luxury of moral superiority, and an optimistic view of the ability of institution-building and soft power to foster peace on their own.

The technocratic and bureaucratic character of the processes of West European integration during the Cold War partly reflected the bitter experience, for promoters of closer union among the peoples of Europe, of the attempt to move directly from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to a European Defence Community (EDC) during 1952–1954. Pursued by French and Benelux politicians in response to US pressure to allow West German rearmament, in order to enable Washington to reduce the number of American divisions defending West Germany from Soviet and (the newly reconstituted) East German forces, EDC necessitated a parallel proposal for a European Political

Community (EPC) to provide legitimacy and authority for common defence. Defence requires strategic direction, and strategy stems from assumptions about national interests and international threats that reflect the settled policy of governing elites. This leap towards political federation proved too ambitious, above all for French politicians who cherished their regained sovereignty and national identity. Following the death of Stalin, which appeared to diminish the threat of Soviet attack, the French Assembly rejected the draft treaty (Fursdon, 1980).

West European integration was thereafter focused on economic issues, negotiated among governments but managed by the expert and non-political Commission. The 'Community Method' devised by Jean Monnet and others aimed to build common institutions first, bringing together national officials and outside experts to work on shared agendas and through that to discover their common interests. This was an elite process, which rested upon assumptions about a passive popular consensus for common policies that delivered successful outcomes at modest cost. Through the long period of post-war economic recovery, when West European economies were steadily growing year after year, rising prosperity provided sufficient public support for a widening Brussels agenda on regulatory and economic issues. This did not, however, translate into greater cross-national consensus on foreign policy; issues of national history and identity, of national sovereignty and national interest, intervened.

The Gaullist challenge in 1961–1963 to NATO's institutionalisation of American strategic leadership in foreign and defence policy, which wanted to substitute French leadership for American rather than promote an integrated West European federation, was gradually moderated after de Gaulle's departure into the intergovernmental mechanisms of European Political Cooperation: regular meetings of European foreign ministers to discuss matters of common interest, under a 6-monthly rotating national presidency, and with a secretariat separate from the EC Commission. Closer cooperation in international diplomacy, therefore, was inhibited by national differences over foreign policy, by questions of cost and political responsibility, above all when questions of military engagement arose, and by the absence of a shared political culture or informed political debate (Wallace, 1983).

After the Wall came down

From one perspective, the end of the Cold War was transformative for what thereafter became the EU. Germany was reunited, becoming again the central state and economy within a wider European state system. The countries between Germany and Russia, which had suffered so during the two world wars and since then, rapidly reoriented towards Western Europe and its established institutions. Under German and French leadership, the European Community raised its ambitions and strengthened its powers. The Maastricht Treaty on European Union (TEU) negotiated in 1990–1991 declared (in Article J of the TEU) that 'a common foreign and security policy is hereby established', which was intended to lead to 'the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence'.

These were carefully negotiated phrases, intended to cover wide gaps in understanding about the implications of such a commitment. They were negotiated against the background of the disintegration, first of the Soviet Union and then of Yugoslavia, followed by the US-led coalition to push the Iraqi army out of Kuwait in what we now call the first Iraq War. There was, however, no explicit discussion of how such a commitment would affect European governments' engagements in such crises, let alone in the broader problems of

the Middle East and Africa or the emerging uncertainties of the 'newly-independent states' around Russia's frontiers. The faith that Jean Monnet had placed in institution-building to bring together national politicians and officials, to encourage them to discover common solutions and then to implement them was extended from the internal economic sphere to the international political arena. It was a leap of faith. West European integration had succeeded in part because the United States, through NATO, had removed the most difficult foreign policy choices from its member governments, and had provided protection against the greatest external threats. But the end of the Cold War diffused those threats rather than removing them.

Institutions first: And last?

The tensions between prioritising institution-building, learning through shared experience in operational deployment and the definition of strategic objectives have dogged EU external ambitions ever since the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The institutions have emerged through successive revisions of the Treaties and Commission restructurings since 1990: first the High Representative (in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty), then the European External Action Service (EEAS) (under the 2009 Lisbon Treaty) and in 2014, a Commission attempt to reduce institutional/bureaucratic rivalries by embedding the High Representative more firmly within the Commission and grouping the several Commissioners responsible for specific areas of external relations under the High Representative in her capacity as Commission Vice-President. In principle, the EU is now equipped with a wide range of instruments for promoting peacemaking and peacebuilding. It has a sizeable external aid budget and other funds to assist development in the European 'neighbourhood'. A network of delegations, more extensive than those of all except the largest member states, means that it is represented on the ground across the world. It funds a series of technical assistance programmes, to train national officials, judges and police. It has appointed special representatives to act on behalf of the EU and its governments in specific crises, in the Balkans, in the Sahel, in the Horn of Africa and in the Middle East. There is an EU military committee in Brussels to coordinate national military contributions to joint operations. National governments contribute to a number of multinational battlegroups, established on French and British initiative in 2004, assembled in rotation and in principle available for rapid deployment when needed. A European Defence Agency, also based in Brussels, promotes common procurement and training. There is a modest, but growing, capacity within the EEAS and the Commission for risk assessment and planning, including a civil-military cell to bring together the different instruments needed for humanitarian operations. An EU Institute of Security Studies (in Paris) provides additional expertise and longer term reflection (Giegerich, 2015). American and NATO officials began to envy the formal capability of the EU to pull together the different civil, military and humanitarian dimensions needed for effective intervention in conflict-ridden or failing states. One outcome was the negotiation of the NATO-EU Strategic Partnership (the 'Berlin Plus' agreement) in 2001–2003, which encourages closer coordination between NATO's narrower security role and the EU's wider competences.

But the EU's national governments pursue their own policies, occasionally in parallel with those negotiated in Brussels, and retain effective vetoes over EU action. It is their forces that must be deployed, their staff that must be mobilised to deal with pandemics or refugee flows. The battlegroups established after long and detailed multilateral negotiation have never been deployed, in spite of requests from the United Nations (UN) for operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and Mali. A civilian power that had initially

to rely on contract aircraft from Ukraine for heavy airlift when managing conflicts across Africa thereafter depended mostly on American-built and Royal-Air-Force-owned heavy-lift transport, though the gradual deployment, after much delay, of national fleets of Airbus A-400 transports will at last provide wider sources from across the EU of this key element to any deployment. Years of argument over whether or not to create a European operational headquarters have pitted the British, who are willing to deploy troops but resist creating a formal EU institutional umbrella, against the Germans who are committed to the institution but are far more cautious about deploying troops. The argument, again, has focussed on the creation of a new institution rather than on what its objectives and capabilities might be, and from what effective authority it should take its decisions.

As a consequence, the most effective instruments available to the EU in promoting peaceful transition and the resolution of conflict have been the blend of financial and technical assistance, market access and political conditionality involved in the process of accession to EU membership. The pattern had been established well before the Cold War ended, in managing the transitions of Spain, Portugal and Greece. From 1990 onwards, it was adapted to manage the more difficult transitions of the former socialist states of East-Central Europe: anxious to integrate with their Western neighbours, but under-estimating the difficulties of adapting their legal, political and economic structures to meet the conditions set. In retrospect, there's a tendency to describe eastern enlargement as a successful strategy.

The Russian government has argued repeatedly that the EU, along with NATO, actively pushed enlargement on to the former socialist states. We should remember, however, how reluctant many EU member states were to enlarge at the outset, and how hard the states in transition pressed to be allowed to join, far sooner than the rich and comfortable Western European governments and their publics were willing to accept. I recall visiting Budapest and Prague in 1990 for conferences during which eager ministers from the new governments expressed their confidence about the welcome Western Europe would provide for their 'return to Europe'. In December 1991, I was part of a group of advisers assembled by Harvard's Kennedy School which took part in a conference in Kiev on foreign policy priorities for Ukraine, a state which had become formally independent a few weeks earlier. The foreign minister arrived late, fresh from his first meeting with the US secretary of state, and proud that he had been granted so much time with representatives of the world's most powerful democratic state. He told us that Ukraine had 'two strategic priorities' for the next 2 years: the first, to join NATO, and the second, to join the EU. My American colleagues asked me to explain that these would not be as easy to achieve as he imagined. Then, and for over two decades since, EU governments have been reluctant to spell out how far eastern enlargement might reach, or where it must stop.

The process of eastern enlargement has applied a model of transition and adjustment first developed for former authoritarian Mediterranean states to a diverse group of ex-Socialist countries, relying on their commitment to gain the status and economic advantages of EU membership to persuade them to accept the conditions attached: an institutional model, with a technical adaptation process. The political incentives to welcome these countries into the EU were tempered by concerns about the cost of financial assistance and domestic acceptability within existing EU states, and by the deliberately incremental processes of technical targets and regular progress reports. With the Eastern Balkan states of Romania and Bulgaria, the contradictions between political imperatives and technical standards, in the face of American pressure for early accession and Russian opposition, led to acceptance into EU membership of governments that had not yet reached the standards of political, judicial or economic probity the EU had set in its

conditions for accession. Applying the same template to the several small and weak states of the Western Balkans, most of them orphans from the disintegration of Yugoslavia, has proved even more difficult. The long saga of negotiations with Turkey over the prospect of full membership—a process which began 50 years ago, and to which none of the parties have ever been fully committed—demonstrates more acutely the limitations of this incremental and technical approach (Sedelmeier, 2015).

The application of the technical procedures the Commission had developed in managing East European enlargement to the Eastern Neighbourhood states, and then at the insistence of the EU's Mediterranean members also to the southern neighbours, was a classic example of following institutional habits rather than considering the diversity of local circumstances and the broader strategic context (Lavenex, 2017). Member states with divergent interests coalesced around neighbourhood policies that looked appropriate from Brussels, but which proved to be desperately unsuitable for Tbilisi, Yerevan, Tunis or Tripoli, and which allowed for severe misunderstandings between the parties about the degree of commitment the other side was making (Smith, 2011).

The inadequacy of other institutional arrangements to which the EU attached importance as foreign policy cooperation developed should also be noted. Regular summits between the EU Presidency and the US Administration had been established in the 1970s, at the insistence of Washington—to the delight of prime ministers and foreign ministers of small member states, who thus had the opportunity to speak for Europe with the US President. The process, and the occasion, provided a domestic boost to the member government concerned, but offered insufficient substance for successive US Administrations. They fell back to annual events in the 1990s, partly because US Presidents and Secretaries of State had less incentive to travel to Europe. The last two such meetings were in November 2011 and March 2014. After the cold war, the EU also pursued a 'Strategic Partnership' with Russia, with regular high-level meetings that have not been sustained. Association of Southeast Asian Nations-EU (ASEAN-EU) summits, equipped with gaudy shirts for all visiting European leaders to wear, have been sustained for longer, but the institutionalisation of gatherings for which the agenda was not clear and the substantive implications uncertain has not proved to be a useful instrument.

Practical experience: Learning by doing

The EU's experience of foreign policy cooperation has often been bitter, but has accumulated some valuable lessons. The collapse of Yugoslavia—a state that many in Western Europe expected to be the first in the queue for EU accession, but which instead disintegrated as underlying historic divisions and enmities came to the surface—did not fit the EU's categorisation of transition or the expectations of its governments. During the ensuing conflict in Bosnia, Britain and France learned to cooperate with each other and learned respect for the quality of their respective armed forces, even as they struggled with the constraints of the initial UN mandate. The French also learned the usefulness of NATO command structures, and became more supportive of cooperation between the EU and NATO. The Dutch learned the most bitter lesson, of the dangers of imprecise mandates in peacekeeping efforts, when their small contingent failed to protect Bosnians in Srebrenica from being massacred by Serb forces in July 1995.

Franco-British cooperation in the field laid part of the foundation for the St Malo Franco-British European defence initiative of 1998. It was intended, among other objectives, to persuade the German government to follow the French in modifying the size and

structure of their armed forces from their Cold War home-defence composition to give higher priority to deployment outside central Europe in peacekeeping or conflict resolution missions. There followed extensive and ambitious discussions for strengthening European defence cooperation, which at one stage involved over 20 working groups. These efforts over more than two years, however, failed to shift the spending priorities of Germany or of other partner governments. This failure justified cynicism, from London above all, about later institutional initiatives by the Belgian and other governments that appeared not to have substantive forces or funds behind them.

Many EU member states deployed forces abroad during these years in UN peacekeeping forces, NATO deployments or other missions: as many as 70,000 European troops were dispatched to deal with acute crises, around 50,000 for sustained periods (Giegerich and Wallace, 2004). These deployments remained largely outside the EU framework, however, and for the Swedes, Irish, Finns and Austrians, significant contributors to UN operations while formally neutral states, also outside the NATO framework.

The United Kingdom and France, however, learned the limits of multilateral intervention, and the advantages of unilateral action, in terms of clearer decision-taking and more rapid deployment. The French had attempted on successive occasions to convert their limited interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo into an EU operation, placing particular pressure on the German government to make a significant contribution—but without sustained success. The British observed what was then the largest UN peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone fail to contain increasing disorder, and sent in a small number of special forces, which succeeded where 27,000 UN peacekeepers—with a strictly limited UN mandate and divisions among its contingents—had not. French or British independent intervention had the advantage of clear lines of command and political authority. In contrast, gaining agreement among over 20 national governments was unavoidably slow and painful, requiring detailed negotiation about operational objectives and guidelines for the use of force.[2]

Slowly and gradually, the EU has accumulated experience of civilian, civil-military and military missions, first in south-east Europe and then across Africa south of the Sahara. Operations in the Western Balkans followed UN and NATO missions which had contained significant forces from EU member states. Operations in and around the Horn of Africa have in some ways been the most successful. The naval Operation Atalanta, commanded by an integrated staff based in the United Kingdom's Joint Forces Headquarters at Northwood, played a major role in reducing the level of piracy in the western Indian Ocean, while parallel training and 'capacity-building' missions in Somalia made moderate progress in returning a degree of order to that disordered land. Across the Sahel, EU training missions for armed forces and police now work in parallel with national teams—one of them the first-ever joint British-Irish military operation—though overshadowed by larger scale French military engagement in Mali. French, British, Danish, Italian and Belgian military aircraft flew over Libya in 2011, together with Norwegian and Canadian aircraft in a US-led NATO operation, and the aircraft of several EU member states were flying over Iraq in 2014–2016, some even over Syria, within a broad international coalition under American command to combat the Islamic State. European naval forces have been working together for several years in an EU-designated operation to combat piracy off the Horn of Africa, and from 2014 on to contain the flow of refugees across the Mediterranean. Operation Atalanta, in the Indian Ocean, has sharply reduced the incidence of piracy, but without resolving the disintegration of Somalia which had fuelled its growth. Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean has

struggled to cope with surges of refugees, and with the reluctance of publics within most EU member states to accept those who are rescued from the Mediterranean by European warships; lawlessness across Libya and the Sahel has allowed networks of people-smugglers to feed migrants onto rickety boats for European ships to pick up.

The most successful model of learning by working together so far has been the long process of negotiations with Iran—primarily about military nuclear capabilities, but with broader implications for the containment of long-term conflict across the Middle East—which were concluded in 2015. EU sanctions on Iran were nested within the US-led sanctions regime, but the EU regime was vital to the overall effectiveness of sanctions. It is significant that the negotiating group was described by the United States, Russia and China as the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany), but by the Germans, British and French as the EU3+3 (sometimes 'E3+3', in any case the European three plus the United States, Russia and China). The EU's High Representative acted as an additional member of the group, reportedly accepted by Iranian negotiators as a partly neutral and trusted interlocutor. The American negotiating team was key to the process, and the Russians difficult partners, but the three major EU governments discovered the depths of their common interests, and worked effectively with the High Representative to contribute to a successful conclusion.

Strategic thinking: What threats, what responses?

The ambitious language of the Maastricht TEU masked a deep inhibition among all member governments about rethinking their national strategic concepts, let alone their shared concepts, in the wake of the transformation of the geopolitical context marked by the reunification of Germany, the withdrawal of the Red Army to behind the Russian frontier, and the lifting of Cold War rivalries that had run through the Western Balkans, across the Mediterranean, and through Africa and the Middle East. Looking back, it is astonishing that developed democracies—with government planning staffs and parliamentary foreign affairs and defence committees and with respected think tanks and university centres for studying international affairs—should have felt so inhibited about reconsidering the threats and challenges that faced them and appropriate national and European responses.

In 1994–1995, a multinational group of researchers at Oxford set out to examine the different national debates within European countries over the strategic implications of the end of the Cold War (see Niblett and Wallace, 2000). They started from the assumption that there must have been a series of active debates, given the growth of expertise and specialised institutions over the previous 40 years across Western Europe, both within and outside governments. They looked at the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. And they were struck by the deep inhibitions, in capital after capital, about openly addressing the scale of the transformation in Europe's strategic context, and its implications for the future of NATO, for the stability of the new states emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union, for those states across Africa and the Middle East that had maintained a degree of stability, and for external financial support, as clients of one side or other under cold war rivalries. West European states moved quickly to reduce their defence budgets and personnel, but left it to American leadership, and to declarations at European Councils, to define strategic problems and priorities.

Only in 2003—12 years after the Maastricht Treaty—did the EU succeed in publishing its own European Security Strategy. The Strategy itself was drafted by a British official then in the High Representative's office, to demonstrate to a US Administration, which

had strong tendencies to act unilaterally, that its European partners had a coherent perspective. It was more easily available in draft in Washington (where I obtained an early copy at a transatlantic conference) than in Brussels or any of the EU's national capitals. When adopted by the European Council, after limited discussion among foreign ministers, it received little further publicity. I wrote round a network of academics then covering the evolution of European cooperation in foreign policy to ask how much attention it had received in national media or parliaments. I was told that only the Finnish Parliament had conducted a full enquiry on its relevance for national policy.

Part of the problem was that successive US administrations, from 1990, wanted to retain strategic leadership over the future of Europe after the Cold War. Papers and proposals flowed from Washington, promoting NATO enlargement, as well as that of the EU, launching NATO dialogues with Russia, Ukraine and the North African states alongside—and in some ways in competition with—the EU. The most disastrous of these 'strategic' initiatives was the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit, at which reluctant European governments acquiesced in Washington's drive to offer the prospect of NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine—a policy pressed forward by conservative Washington think tanks (Asmus, 2002; Brown, 1995). Enlargement of NATO to the Baltic states had initially been announced by President Clinton in a campaign speech to Baltic-American groups in Chicago—domestic politics and global strategy intertwined. Yet major European governments did not challenge US strategic leadership, nor actively spell out alternative visions of European 'architecture' or order (Eyal, 1997). Governments in London instinctively looked to Washington for leadership, while those in Berlin preferred to avoid strategic thinking. Thinkers in Paris claimed greater autonomy, but their strategic thinking was clearer on Africa than on wider global trends.

Academics have investigated the poverty of strategic culture in European capitals, in large states and small (Biava et al., 2011; Matlary, 2006). There has been a deep reluctance to accommodate the challenges of a more diverse and disordered world, let alone to come to any common view about an appropriate European response. For smaller European states, the EU itself provided a means of putting off critical re-examination of national priorities. The foreign minister of one of the smaller West European states told me, nearly 20 years after the Berlin Wall came down, that the EU's procedures in some ways had made it easier to avoid the difficult choices at national level:

> We go to Brussels, we negotiate and sign some stirring paragraphs on common foreign and defence policy, and come home satisfied that we have achieved something—without recognising that if we and others do nothing to implement what has been agreed, nothing will happen.[3]

Enlargement itself has made coherence more difficult, in a field in which national governments and national capabilities remain key to the authorisation of common action. It is far more difficult to generate agreement among 26–28 foreign ministers than 9 or 12. I am told by participants that only in informal foreign ministers' meetings are underlying issues now addressed, beyond the current agenda. Smaller states have narrower sets of interests—as visits I made when in government to the capitals of some smaller states brought home vividly. Baltic member states, for understandable reasons of perspective, attach far lower priority to North Africa than to Russia, and Mediterranean states take the opposite view. In the federal United States, the executive clout of Washington imposes foreign policy priorities on 50 diverse states. The EU, however, is a weak confederation, in which national capitals retain their own international

perspectives and national interests, and national debates are separated by different languages and the distinctive narratives of national media.

Greater ambition, fewer inhibitions?

It is difficult to find appropriate criteria against which to assess the record of the EU and its member states in managing the unstable regions around its borders over the past 25 years. The EU is not a federation, but the rhetoric of its leaders over the years has suggested that a common foreign policy, comparable to that of a federal state, was within its grasp. The extension of membership, economic prosperity, political stability and democratic values across east-central Europe, much of south-east Europe and the Baltic states has been a clear success, in spite of continuing problems over political liberties and corruption in some new members. Stabilisation, conflict prevention and resolution across the weak states of Africa have attracted much money and technical assistance, with mixed success, although some would argue that the problems African societies faced in terms of population rise and rapid social and economic transformation were intractable. States such as Eritrea, from which nearly one-third of the migrants (or refugees) trafficked across the Mediterranean in 2013–2014 came, have continued to fester without active EU engagement. Conflict within Sudan—continuing after the granting of independence because of overlapping conflicts within Sudan and Southern Sudan—has persisted throughout a long succession of UN, EU and other interventions. The three non-African governments most active in attempting to mediate among the factions in Southern Sudan in 2013–2015 were Norway, the United States and the United Kingdom—only one of which (then) was an EU member. The migrant surge from sub-Saharan Africa was predicted many years ago. European intervention in Libya in 2011, alongside the Americans and with UN authorisation but without any politico-strategic consensus on this long-term challenge, inadvertently opened the door wider than before. State weakness, population growth, climate change and civil conflict across Africa present an evident long-term challenge to all European states, spilling across the Mediterranean in migrant flows, criminal networks and unfamiliar diseases. But the EU collectively has not been able to make much progress in constructing a coherent response.

Over the past decade, the increasing hostility of President Valdimir Putin's regime in Russia to integrated action by European governments has presented the EU with a growing security challenge. Until recently, France, Germany and the United Kingdom all preferred commercial diplomacy towards Russia, while allowing the EU collectively to pursue partnerships with Ukraine and Georgia divorced from political analysis of Russia's likely response. Powerful business lobbies within Germany long dominated its relationship with Moscow, and still exert significant influence. Russian money has flowed freely into and through London—some of it most probably 'laundered' from corrupt activities within Russia or elsewhere; wealthy Russians own British football clubs and media outlets, while their children mix with their Chinese counterparts at English boarding schools. The French contracted to build and sell helicopter-carriers to Russia, only breaking the contract after Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the shooting down of a civilian airliner (Malaysian Airlines flight ML17) by Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. These combined shocks pushed the EU into the imposition of a targeted sanctions regime, which—together with the sustained fall in international oil prices—has had some impact on Russian policy, and demonstrated an effective foreign policy instrument the EU can wield when all its member states agree. Yet, open questioning in Italy, Germany and Eastern European member states of the desirability of extending these

sanctions from one agreed time period to another has weakened their political impact and left space for disruptive Russian diplomacy. The United Kingdom, in effect, opted out of the Ukraine/Russia crisis as civil war broke out across eastern Ukraine, distracted by its domestic debate about the closeness of its relationship with its European neighbours, leaving it to an increasingly active German government, together with its French counterpart, to attempt to negotiate with Moscow.

It is too soon to tell whether the migration crisis will similarly push a reluctant EU towards a more coherent approach to the immensely complicated politics of the Middle East Muslim world—although the evidence of the EU's confused response thus far has not been encouraging. The migration crisis, both from Middle East states in conflict and from Africa, presents an almost existential challenge to European states. The continuing rate of population growth across the Middle East and North Africa, and the impact of climate change across those regions, implies that millions of desperate people from a wide range of countries will do their utmost to reach the security and prosperity which Europe appears to offer, while resistance within Europe's native population to immigration will continue to grow. The number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean and the borders between Turkey and the EU in 2015 was more than double the number for 2014. Only the (very fragile) March 2016 agreement with Turkey to stem the flow through its territory had moderated the flow. The overwhelming majority of those arriving in 2014–2015 were from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and Afghanistan, although Ethiopians, Somalis, Sudanese, Nigerians and others added to the flow.

Until recently, European policies towards the Sunni Arab states were largely commercial, with Britain and France competing vigorously to sell weapons systems to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. The growth of Sunni Islamic radicalism, with terrorist incidents in several EU member states, has forced European governments to reassess their commitments. Dutch and Belgian military aircraft, as well as British and French, have flown missions against Islamic State at various times in 2015–2016. The greatest inhibition against the development of any coherent European policy has been the complexity of the conflict, with the Saudis, Turks, Emiratis and Qataris all pursuing different priorities, and the Russians and Iranians complicating the picture further. Different immigrant communities in different member states, different intelligence assessments of the changing conflicts and the intentions of the many state and non-state actors inhibit any common response.

Popular disillusion, intractable challenges?

By late 2016, the EU's ambitions for a more coherent international diplomacy were constrained by a range of external and internal pressures. The interconnected challenges of immigration and the Middle East were the most severe, as discontented Muslim youth from several European countries continued to follow the appeal of Islamic radical movements, most of all of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)/Daesh, while desperate refugees from Syria and the rest of the Muslim world attempted to reach the safety of European countries. Popular resistance to further immigration, experience of terrorist attacks and fears of others to come combined to increase support for right-wing parties opposed to further integration. The British government's unwise commitment to a Referendum on EU membership, in June 2016, was lost at least partly on the issue of immigration, both from within the EU and outside. Opinion poll evidence suggested that a comparable wave of disillusionment with the EU and its pretensions to closer union had also affected many other member states (Pew Research Center, 2016). The German Chancellor's generous

gesture in welcoming large numbers of Syrian refugees, in early 2016, was undermined by terrorist incidents, the disapproval of a substantial number of her electorate and the refusal of the governments of other EU member states, most explicitly those of East European states, to accept that European solidarity extended to sharing the burden of resettling refugees. And all of these challenges preceded the election of Donald Trump—who had earlier applauded the United Kingdom's vote to leave the EU—as US President.

In 2015–2016, the European Commission, led in this task by Federica Mogherini, High Representative since 2014, had embarked on a determined effort to draft a new EU Global Strategy (Commission, 2016). Mogherini used her institutional position and the EEAS to attempt to focus the attention of member governments on common challenges and threats. The purpose of this strategic review was to encourage a more open and cross-national debate, above all in the three key players in European diplomacy—Germany, France and the United Kingdom—but also among the other 25 member states. Weaker American engagement in the world, a markedly more hostile and suspicious Russian government, a Middle East region in continuing turmoil and a Chinese government less open to economic cooperation all set the terms, the document argued, for a necessary debate on European international priorities.

However, domestic discontents within most member states, and above all within its key players, allowed little space for reasoned discussion of drafts in the months leading up to its publication in July 2016. The British appeared to be disengaging from the EU as such; the French were struggling under a deeply unpopular government, an economic recession and rising tensions within its immigrant communities; the German Chancellor, who had emerged in the past two years as Europe's effective international leader, was hemmed in by domestic resistance to mass immigration and resistance to German spending or deployments outside the EU. The July European Council to which the new strategy was presented was too preoccupied with the implications of the UK Referendum result, with terrorist attacks and with the continuing flow of migrants across the Mediterranean, to devote much time to longer term considerations. The opening sentences of the Strategy paper were, in effect, an appeal to European governments, parliaments and publics to recognise the intensity of the threats that they faced:

> We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned. To the east, the European security order has been violated, while terrorism and violence plague North Africa and the Middle East, as well as Europe itself. Economic growth is yet to outpace demography in parts of Africa, security tensions in Asia are mounting, while climate change causes further disruption.

The paper called for the EU to accept that it must take responsibility for its own security (rather than hoping that the United States, through NATO, would provide it) to strengthen its energy security, to develop a more concerted external message to counter hostile narratives from elsewhere and to accept the need for closer defence cooperation. None of these are easy goals to realise.

Conclusion

The EU represents a zone of peace and stability, which enjoyed a period of relative peace and security after the end of the cold war, but which is now surrounded on three sides by

rising disorder without the provision of American security leadership to guide European governments. It has gradually developed a number of institutions and instruments for exerting external influence, although not an underlying consensus about the purposes they should serve or the threats to which they should respond. Peacekeeping and peace-making in marginal African states and the seas around them, while the United States managed potentially more serious threats in the Middle East and Eurasia, are now having to give way to collectively confronting major challenges. Policy-makers in Washington—especially those in an incoming Trump administration—expect NATO's European members to look after their own region. It is not easy to be confident that the member governments of the EU and their useful but fragile common institutions will be able to generate either the domestic support or shared appreciation of external challenges to meet the challenge.

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Notes

1. This article is adapted from a speech given at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, 13 November 2015.
2. The problem of political authority for the use of force inhibits all collaboration in military operation, although acceptance of US leadership within NATO has to some extent made it acceptable for other contributors to bow to US judgement. When the British commander of the UK-Dutch Marine Amphibious Force, deployed in northern Iraq to protect Kurdish areas in the aftermath of the 1991 expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait, ordered his Dutch company to undertake a potentially risky operation, his Dutch subordinate asked for confirmation from his national capital: correctly, since if any Dutch marines had been killed in the operation, it would have been the Dutch government that would have had to answer to its own Parliament.
3. Personal information.

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