

NATO, U.S. and the EU in the Changing International Environment

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There is no news that states perceptions of the international environment in terms of threats to national security in a broader sense suffered a tremendous adjustment after September 11 attacks. Although no new threats were registered, their scale and consequences compelled the international community to find common grounds in assessing the newly emerged situation and in assuming new roles for the existing alliances (either politico-military such as NATO or with military aspirations such as the E.U.).

Non-state actors had played in the past a positive, constructive role on the international arena. Nowadays, they overtly support organized crime and international terrorism and therefore don't want to change the current order of the system as it favors their actions. Therefore, international organizations and particularly Western organizations such as NATO and the E.U. need to adapt their strategies in order to better cope with this new trend.

New roles and missions NATO assumed are about to transform it in the "policeman of the world" and although NATO had been created for a very specific purpose when "the coalition defined the mission" in this new context and environment "the mission defines the coalition". The new statement that the "mission defines the coalition" was somehow a blow to NATO, because NATO as a whole was not prepared to deal with such a type of operation based on the "coalition of the willing", a setback that provoked rifts in the transatlantic relation.

Both U.S. and the E.U., delivered security strategies (the latter as a consequence to its

desire to put in practice its CFSP policy and assume new military roles) with impact on the future foreign policy to be followed and thorough evaluation of them is welcome and necessary.

While the issuance of the U.S. security strategy (USSS) is already a tradition and was hammered out as a result of an existing external threat, the E.U. security strategy (EUSS) came out as a result of the strains registered in the transatlantic relation and the need to make the CFSP more assertive.

When comparing the two security strategies one should note since the beginning a clear dichotomy between the timeframe chosen as starting point for laying down the objectives to be followed. While the emphasis in the EUSS is put on the events starting 1989 in Europe and the outcome they produced and how it shaped the European security environment, the USSS has a dominating agenda set in 2001, following the tragic events of 9/11.

The red thread to be followed throughout the EUSS touches upon how to extend EU values and norms within Europe but also in its "near abroad". Referring only to these regions as areas of interests notwithstanding, the EU is assuming a global role, which basically doesn't match with its area of interest and responsibility ("The increasing convergence of European interests and the strengthening of mutual solidarity of the EU makes us a more credible and effective actor. Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security"¹). In opposition, the dominating thought of the USSS is to seek security on a global basis ("Today, the world's great powers

find ourselves on the same side—united by common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos. The United States will build on these common interests to promote global security”².

Both documents do not differ fundamentally on the common threat assessment putting a great weight on either solely WMD proliferation (USSS) or a combination of three factors such as international terrorism, WMD proliferation and failed states. The difference between the two occurs in how to handle such threat, bringing into question the hotly debated idea of pre-emptive actions. While the USSS is clearly stating that “to forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively”³, the EUSS still stresses the importance of an existing UN mandate for a decision requiring the application of military force (“The fundamental framework for international relations is the United Nations Charter. Strengthening the United Nations, equipping it to fulfill its responsibilities and to act effectively, must be a European priority.”)⁴ Furthermore, the EUSS is talking about pre-emptive engagement but not dwelling upon this term because the EU does not foresee any pre-emptive military action. There are several reasons that explain this attitude: first, the EU does not have the necessary military capabilities to undertake pre-emptive strikes as the U.S. recently employed in Iraq; second, the E.U. does not want to create a precedent alongside the U.S. and transform it in a rule to be followed, as other major powers or even rogue states can also pursue it and use it as a discretionary tool; third, it is very difficult to identify without doubt the right moment to use pre-emption against *imminent* threat as the Iraqi case showed up (lack of hard evidence regarding production of WMD in Iraq undermined the whole idea of pre-emptive action).

The USSS conveys the idea that U.S. does not enjoy the idea of unilateralism but also does not clearly state its interest in multilateralism: “America will implement its strategies by organizing coalitions—as broad as

practicable—of states able and willing to promote a balance of power that favors freedom. Effective coalition leadership requires clear priorities, an appreciation of others’ interests, and consistent consultations among partners with a spirit of humility.”⁵ On the other hand the EUSS is stressing the idea of building “an international order based on effective multilateralism”.⁶ Does it mean that until now multilateralism was not effective? Or that Iraq proved to be the first actions/operations in a long range to come where the U.S. imposed its interests, making the idea of multilateralism only empty shell.

Both documents stress the importance attached to contain “soft” security threats and in particular they refer to the need to have good governance. Tone of the strategic objective of the E.U. is “restoring good government in the Balkans, fostering democracy and enabling the authorities there to tackle organized crime.”⁷ There are differences/gaps between what E.U. declares and what actually can do and although E.U. is asserting itself as global actor its actions are confined to the European continent and with slightly exceptions to Middle East (politically involved in the peace process) or Africa (see operation Artemis). The USSS lays instead a great emphasis on “freedom”, with good governance sense attached: “For freedom to thrive accountability must be expected and required.”⁸

Although it takes stock of the means to implement its strategic objectives, the EUSS does not dwell upon them much. „Proliferation may be contained through export controls and attacked through political, economic and other pressures while the underlying political causes are also tackled. Dealing with terrorism may require a mixture of intelligence, political, military and other means. In failed states, military instruments may be needed to restore order, humanitarian to tackle the immediate crisis. Economic instruments serve reconstruction, and civilian crisis management helps restore civil government. The European Union is particularly well equipped to respond to such multi-faceted situations.”⁹

Is this only self-fulfilling prophecy the E.U. needs to accommodate its weaknesses? The E.U. is in between phases trying to build up an effective independent military force able to act under the E.U. hat and assume more roles for combat-type operations not only Petersberg tasks. Do the Americans agree with it? Is it a threat to NATO? Or it is a long-awaited move that lifts some burdens from U.S./NATO shoulders?

All in all, both NATO and E.U. encountered major shifts in their projecting interests and means to accomplish them. The creation of NATO Response Force and E.U. Rapid Reaction Force (although it was declared operational in 2003 it still has shortfalls of capabilities) alongside engagement in operations in Afghanistan and possibly in Iraq (for NATO) and in FYROM, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Congo (for the E.U) prove the case.

NOTES:

¹ A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003, p. 2.

² The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, p. 1.

³ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Prevent Our Enemies from Threatening Us, Our Allies, and Our Friends with WMD, June 2002, p. 15.

⁴ A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003, p.9.

⁵ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Develop Agendas for Cooperative Action with the Other Main Centers of Global Power, June 2002, p. 25.

⁶ A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003, p. 9.

⁷ A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003, p. 6.

⁸ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, p. 3.

⁹ A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003, p. 7.