

31 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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The European Union is going through a prolonged period of crisis, and as the regional and global environment becomes more challenging, the EU needs to adopt a global strategy that is pragmatic.

The EU's Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) therefore has to start with an understanding of power, accept the realities of politics and aim towards preservation.

The three Ps

Foreign policy is about power, politics and preservation. Framing the EU's foreign policy and designing a grand strategy requires the EU to be cognizant of all dimensions of these three Ps. The EUGS has to be interest-driven, but that does not mean that the EU will pursue its ends with any means.

The pursuit of the EU's interests has, of course, to be guided in some way or other by its values and principles. A credible EUGS must be one that is grounded in realities and can be operationalised

to have real impact on decision- and policymaking while taking this fact into account.

Despite the current crises, the EU retains considerable power. If and how it is able to translate its resources into actual influence should be one of the key deliberations in the EUGS. We are now all well aware of the fact that member states remain reluctant to substantially pool their sovereignty and delegate authority in the area of foreign and security policy. Hence the essentially inter-governmental mode of decision-making in CFSP. With enlargement and increasingly complex internal and external dynamics the divergence between member states' national interests and between national and European interests should not be underestimated. This is where politics comes in.

The EU can no longer pretend that policymaking is purely a process of rational pursuit and can proceed in a technocratic, depoliticised fashion. If the EU wants an EUGS that can resonate, it needs active 'diplomatic' engagement with all its member states, and not a bureaucratic approach

towards defining and pursuing common interests.

The EUGS should not be just another shopping list of threats and risks, and actions the EU can undertake to mitigate them. The EUGS should be about the EU doing all that it can to remain a relevant player in reforming and adapting the current rules of the game (or if there is to be a new world order, the EU being involved in the crafting of its new rules). As a result, its mantra of working with partners and promoting effective multilateralism (a guiding principle for EU foreign policy in the 2003 European Security Strategy) remains as relevant if not more important in the new strategic environment.

A delicate balancing act

The two most important players in the changed global environment are the US and China. Both are not in any way the most ‘principled’ multilateral players, often resorting to unilateral approaches as and when it suits them. Other emerging or re-emerging players are also complicating the rules of the game. And as competition and rivalry between the US and China intensifies, the EU needs to think strategically about where it wants to position itself. It will need to strike a fine balance between a longstanding ally and an increasingly important player that already has substantive trade and investment ties with the EU.

Are the EU’s and the US’ core interests still as aligned as they were in the Cold War era? Is the EU prepared to accept the US’ ‘leadership’ and be a loyal ally even at the expense of its relationship with China? These are important questions

that the EU needs to consider when formulating its EUGS. If the EU is keen to develop its own identity as a global player, the one guiding principle that sets it somewhat apart from major powers such as the US and China is its adherence to multilateralism.

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Internally, the current migrant/refugee crisis has shown how unilateralism can challenge the very edifice of the EU. There is therefore the need for the Union to re-emphasise and invest in effective multilateralism.

The EU should survey the existing plethora of multilateral forums and institutions and invest strategically in those in which they can make a difference, whether it is the OSCE, G20 or newer institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB).

While it is necessary for the EU to have vision and ambition, it is more important to be credible and focus on what is feasible and doable. The EU is facing unprecedented challenges in its own neighbourhood – from a resurgent Russia, to the waves of the refugees arriving in its backyard. An effective EUGS cannot ignore the realities of these immediate challenges.

The prominent political scientist Joseph Nye warned in a recent article about the dangers of a weak Europe. Thus, the exercise in crafting the EUGS must pay as much attention to the internal divisions as it does external threats. After all, foreign policy is an extension of domestic politics.

