

Interview with Nathalie Tocci on the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy

Nathalie Tocci

ABSTRACT

The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe", presented at the European Council on 24 June 2016 by Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, was drafted by Nathalie Tocci, Deputy Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and co-editor of *The International Spectator*.

Given the importance of the document, we asked Nathalie for an interview and 18 foreign policy experts from around the world to comment on it.

KEYWORDS

European Union; Global Strategy; defence; security; principled pragmatism; resilience; strategic autonomy

The International Spectator (TIS): With the Brexit having almost overshadowed the publication of the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), the question that is on everyone's mind is: Was this the right time to introduce such an important document? To what extent can the GS be considered legitimate, given that it was produced through a process which included a substantial number of UK actors? It almost seems as though we have a key policy document that has been shaped to some degree by a non EU member and by its non-EU interests.

How will Brexit affect the EU's security strategy? Will adjustments be necessary? What kind of road map do you envisage to make the EUGS more debated and shared?

Tocci: There are two issues regarding the EUGS and Brexit: the first is timing, the second content. As regards timing, it is indeed legitimate to ask oneself whether releasing the EUGS the day after the Brexit referendum was wise. No doubt on 24 June the focus of discussion was elsewhere, as was the attention of the European Council a few days later, when it welcomed the presentation of the EUGS. Arguably, however, the attention of the European Council is always elsewhere, especially in recent years in which the EU has been confronted by one crisis after another. The truth is that it is difficult to imagine a moment in the last five or six years in which it would have been ideal to release a strategy. Worse still, Brexit is or risks triggering such a profound crisis within the Union, that had the publication of the Strategy been postponed it may have never seen the light of day. So why let a document such as this, which was subject to detailed discussions, public outreach and negotiations over the last two years, which found the agreement of all 28 – yes 28 – member states and

EU institutions die away? Is it not precisely in such times of crisis that we need to hang on to all of what we have to strive for the survival of the European project? HR/VP Federica Mogherini's decision to present the Global Strategy is not a sign of naïve optimism and the otherworldliness of European institutions. It is rather the result of an extremely sobering assessment of the current predicament in Europe.

The second issue regards content. Does the EUGS, worked on at 28, actually still make sense at 27? The short answer is yes. Together with Federica Mogherini, I spent 24 June reviewing the document with post-Brexit eyes. Beyond tweaking the style and some of the key political messages of the document, we reviewed whether content-wise anything required real change. Other than strengthening at the margins some of the wording on defence, in reality there was nothing we could have significantly changed without meeting the dissent of other member states. The EU's interests, goals and the means required to achieve them are the same. The EU's capacity to do all this is potentially much reduced without the UK. Hence, the imperative of negotiating a deal which will include the UK's ongoing cooperation with CFSP/CSDP from outside the EU if possible. However, I believe there is a myth, particularly in die-hard federalist circles in the EU, surrounding the UK's approach to foreign and security policy. First, while the UK is ideologically opposed to the notion of deeper integration in this field, it has made important practical contributions to it over the years. In the process of drafting the EUGS, the UK was amongst the most constructive member states. Second, while the UK is certainly the most vocal about its opposition to a number of issues concerning in particular CSDP, it hides the scepticism of other member states, notably those which, like the UK, continue to view NATO as the ultimate framework for security and defence.

TIS: The last time the EU embarked on a similar undertaking, in 2003, it delivered what was strictly a security strategy. Why is it that this time the security dimension has been integrated into something bigger?

Tocci: Javier Solana presented the first European Security Strategy. He did so as High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In other words, he could present *only* a security strategy because this is what fell within the remit of his mandate. Federica Mogherini is not *only* the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, she is *also* the Vice President of the European Commission, chairing the Commissioners' Group on External Action. She has therefore presented a Global Strategy, where the meaning of 'global' is both functional and geographic. In other words, we worked not only on the security aspects of the strategy, but took a 'whole of EU' approach, looking also at trade, development, migration, energy, climate and much more.

TIS: The 2003 EES was largely seen as a reaction to the perceived failure by the EU to present an alternative to the US's strategy. How much does the Global Strategy owe to other similar documents, and to what extent is it an entirely original exercise? Does it point to goals, assets and principles for action that are specific to the EU alone?

Tocci: We certainly studied other security strategies, beginning with the US's but also Japan's, NATO's Strategic Concept, and the security strategies of individual EU member states. It was useful to have these as general points of reference, but they played no role in the actual

drafting of the EUGS. These are processes that live lives of their own, more so if the subject at hand is not a state, nor an international organisation, but a fuzzy entity lying somewhere in between.

TIS: And what about common European interests ... are they all appreciated with the same intensity or immediacy by all European countries?

Tocci: Yes, I would say they are. The interpretation of these interests and how they are to be met of course differs. Let us take the interest in security: Poland, Sweden or Lithuania feel their security is under threat from Russia; France or Belgium feel the threat of terrorism far more directly.

TIS: One of the more 'courageous' parts of the Strategy is the one dedicated to security and defence, in particular European defence. The first question is: what exactly do you mean by strategic autonomy?

Tocci: The ability of the Union to decide autonomously and have the means to act upon its decisions. While it ought not be confined to the military domain, it is evident that it is in this area that the EU's strategic autonomy has not yet been realised.

TIS: To what extent does this Strategy compete with or complement NATO commitments to defence spending? What is the formula for burden-sharing within this Strategy?

Tocci: The EUGS calls upon member states to take greater responsibility for their security and live up to their commitments to solidarity and mutual assistance enshrined in the Treaties. To the extent that defence is part of security, there is an appeal to member states to acquire and maintain those capabilities necessary for the protection of their security – capabilities which can often only be developed through collaborative efforts. Whether these capabilities are then used in the context of EU, NATO, UN or other multinational efforts is a second order question and the EUGS does not take a stand on this. As such, the approach taken in the EUGS is different from, but perfectly compatible with NATO, given that 24 of its members are part of both the EU and NATO.

TIS: What are the essential elements of the comprehensive approach to conflicts and crises advocated by the Strategy and how can it be effectively implemented against the increasingly complex and asymmetric security challenges that the EU has to face?

Tocci: The traditional interpretation of the comprehensive approach – the use of all available instruments and policies in a coherent way – is restated in the EUGS. But the aim is to go beyond this interpretation precisely because of the complexity of conflicts, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Hence, the call to take both the local and regional dimensions of these conflicts more seriously (rather than acting only at the state and international levels, which tends to be the norm) and also to act more multilaterally, both on the field and in the international arena.

TIS: What exactly do you mean when you say that defence cooperation should be the norm? Is this an appeal to institutionalised cooperation or would this also include coalitions of the willing?

Tocci: The Treaties allow for both, in particular the EUGS makes a (not so) veiled call for enhanced cooperation as well as permanent structured cooperation between groups of willing and able member states.

TIS: Where does the EU enjoy “a good record on pre-emptive peacebuilding and diplomacy”? Is this a reference to the Western Balkans, the Great Lakes region, the Middle East? The point here is not to be rude, but rather to underscore that there are significant conflicts that slip through the “pre-emptive peacebuilding and diplomacy” net. Are you ready to go back and reconsider the Petersberg tasks?

Tocci: Examples in Macedonia, Aceh/Indonesia, Montenegro, Kenya or Albania stand out. The point about these cases is precisely that, having been successful cases of prevention, they tend to be quickly forgotten or have never made it onto the media radar screen at all. Even at a more local level, there are plenty of cases of EU delegations supporting small projects particularly in Africa, Latin America and Asia that have a clear emphasis on prevention, dialogue and reconciliation. One point made in the Strategy is that delegations ought to have greater flexibility and discretion in mobilising small funds precisely for these purposes.

TIS: “Solving conflicts and promoting development and human rights in the south is essential to addressing the threat of terrorism.” Yet, according to leaked classified intelligence documents, almost all of the victims of American drone strikes in Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan during a five-month period were civilians. Air strikes within the framework of similar programs are also carried out by EU member states. In March 2016, France and Britain actually agreed on a £1.5 billion plan for combat drones. Any comments on this? Furthermore, should the EU also deal with the externalities of US actions on European security when addressing the threat of terrorism?

Tocci: Personally, I cannot imagine the EU as such ever agreeing to drone strikes in third countries (even assuming we had the capabilities to carry them out, which we don’t). The complexity of EU decision-making in CFSP and CSDP is such that I can’t imagine consensus at 27 or 28 to carry out interventions of this kind. This doesn’t mean that member states do not carry them out, nor that the EU can prevent them from doing this.

TIS: To what extent should member states consider the need to strengthen relations between the EU and NATO as they negotiate the withdrawal of Great Britain from the European Union?

Tocci: Even before Brexit there was a strong push to move in this direction. Political relations between the HR/VP and NATO’s Secretary General are very positive, as is practical cooperation in the field, where both CSDP missions or operations and NATO are present. An effort is currently underway to strengthen cooperation between the EU and NATO in a number of areas, including defence capability development, cyber,

hybrid and maritime security. A Cyprus settlement over the next months would be the ultimate ice-breaker in this respect.

TIS: Finally, and almost most importantly, did you perceive any real willingness on the part of the member states, during the process of consultation with them that preceded the publication of the Strategy, to go forward toward a common defence policy, more common capabilities, or greater integration of national defence industries?

Tocci: Everything in the text was agreed, line by line by all 28 member states. While the EUGS is not a legally binding document, all member states are or should be politically committed to it. While led by the HR/VP, the Global Strategy is of and for the EU, not simply of the HR/VP.

TIS: Particularly with regard to “our neighbours” to the east and the south, the EUGS puts the emphasis on reducing the fragility of states and increasing resilience. While the promotion of democratisation (and regime change) is no longer on the agenda (and realistically so), the question remains how to strike a balance between the EU’s cooperation with partly repressive regimes (in the interests of the EU and its member states) and the strengthening of the resilience of people and society – without risking to actually strengthen those repressive regimes.

Secondly, the objective of increasing the resilience of peoples and societies, notably by fighting poverty and inequality so that change can emerge, is an important but enormous task. Where will the funds to finance this objective come from? How can the EU’s diplomatic and financial tools be mobilised better in order to meet the objective of supporting resilient societies within and beyond its borders? And how can we make sure that the economic interests of the EU and its member states, which are not necessarily congruent with the objective of fighting poverty and inequality in neighbouring states, will not prevail?

How can the inherent tension between “state and societal resilience” be reconciled without sacrificing societal development for the sake of state stability? Could the answer be an approach that is normatively differentiated on the basis of the different stages of the conflict/security cycle reached by each state-society relationship?

Tocci: There is no magic bullet to solve this dilemma. The EUGS tries to move away from the dichotomous and at times hypocritical approach of the past of “talking” democracy while “doing” stability. It also moves away from a narrative of “democratisation at any cost” which was used, notably by the US, to discursively legitimise atrocious acts, such as the 2003 war in Iraq. This does not mean that one word – resilience – does the trick. I think that, in cases of entrenched authoritarianism, a resilience-centred approach would focus on the rule of law in its approach to governance, on civil society support in its societal dimension, and on reducing inequalities in its economic dimension. Above all, it requires long-term commitment. Cases such as Myanmar/Burma demonstrate that, while change may take decades to come, it will inevitably be driven largely by domestic forces, so a ‘resilient’ EU approach over time can pay off.

The EUGS will be implemented within the current budget cycle. In other words, we cannot expect more money, but can work to make sure that allocated funds are used differently – that is, focusing on the priorities of the Strategy – and more flexibly.

TIS: In practice, to what extent and to what effect could the new EU Global Strategy change the ways in which the EU has addressed changing realities in the MENA region so far, including both the countries that have been going through transition and those that are experiencing violent conflicts?

Tocci: The EUGS approaches the Middle East with a degree of humility. There are no hopes or expectations that the EU can redefine the regional order in the Middle East with grandiose plans (in words at least) like the Euro Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) or the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Nor are there expectations that bilateral policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) can trigger the democratisation of Middle Eastern countries like Egypt with (unfulfilled) promises of more money, mobility and markets. Policies like the ENP should focus, rather, on more modest goals like resilience; diplomacy should foster the space for dialogue and practical cooperation in cases such as Iran-Gulf; and efforts at conflict resolution should support regional efforts in cases such as Syria or Libya, as well as acting more seriously at the local level, notably by promoting human security. The West in general, including the EU and its member states, played no small role in the unravelling of the Middle East, often driven by the illusion that we could ‘fix’ the region. The EUGS attempts to move away from this dangerous myth, without however forgetting our responsibilities towards the region. The notion of ‘principled pragmatism’ attempts precisely to capture this approach.

TIS: Speaking of principled pragmatism, the two key interests mentioned in the Global Strategy – security and democracy – may cause some dilemmas internally (counter-terrorism might mean restricting some freedoms, migration policies might violate human rights norms) and externally (counter-terrorism might contradict policies which support a rule-based international order). Do you think that principled pragmatism as an underlying principle of the Global Strategy can square the circle?

Tocci: Principled pragmatism seeks to move the debate away from false dichotomies and well known hypocrisies: be it the sterile debate on ‘interests versus values’, or on ‘interventionism versus retrenchment’. The point it tries to make is that we should observe the world (and ourselves) as it is, not as we would like to see it. We must be more modest at times in what we believe we can achieve and what we cannot. But modesty should not translate into closure or passivity. We must engage the world and do so responsibly, but without the illusion that we can unilaterally bring peace, security, democracy or prosperity to the world. Not only is this an illusion, it is also a dangerous one.

TIS: “The EU will work closely with the Quartet, the Arab League and all key stakeholders to preserve the prospect of a viable two-state solution based on 1967 lines.” How can the two-state solution be pursued without implementing sanctions or some practical forms of pressure (like the ones implemented in Crimea)?

Tocci: I cannot imagine consensus amongst member states on imposing sanctions on Israel. What I think is achievable – and we are already moving in this direction with the decisions on labelling the products of Israeli settlements or excluding settlement-based entities from being eligible for Horizon 2020 research funding – is to ensure that the EU's relations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority are conducted in respect of international and EU law. This is precisely why this point is made in the EUGS.

TIS: Migration is largely dealt with between the lines of the GS, despite it being arguably the EU's major foreign policy problem. Did Interior Ministries resist migration being showcased as a foreign policy issue?

Tocci: No, I would say the opposite. There was a push from several member states in Central and Eastern Europe in particular – which we succeeded to some extent in blocking – to talk only about the external dimension of migration, with an emphasis on external border management and the use of external migration policy aimed at keeping migrants and refugees in their countries of origin and transit. We pushed back against this, making the case that the EU's external migration policy would only have a chance of success if complemented by internal policies aimed at ensuring the right to asylum and implementing legal channels for migration.

TIS: The EU's Global Strategy states that “we will promote and support cooperative regional orders worldwide, including in the most divided areas”. Cooperative regional orders sounds like a great idea, but what are you going to do when major powers in specific regions choose self-help over cooperation or want cooperation to be exclusive or closed rather than inclusive and open?

Tocci: We cannot force anyone to be cooperative, let alone impose our model of cooperation on others. Nor can we do much to counter policies that seek division, be it in Europe, the Middle East or East Asia. We can only support efforts at cooperation when the will to do so in these regions exists.

TIS: But with respect to China, for instance, what happens if China turns on Hong Kong or gets restless in the South China Sea? There is no real provision for extended force projection or even real engagement with China.

Tocci: I doubt the EU and its member states would have the capacity to stop this, were it to happen. We should take Asian security more seriously, standing up in support of the rule of law in East Asia and help build the maritime capacities of our East Asian partners, including perhaps through CSDP. But I believe it is an illusion to think the EU can act as a real game-changer in Asian security.

TIS: Very few references to institutional and procedural mechanisms (and their improvements) can be found in the document. For example, there is no proposal for setting up a formal Defence Council or a civilian/military Headquarter. There is no criticism of the veto power that still exists in the Council (art. 31.7) where QMV should be the basic rule. Is this due to the resistance of member states to embark on institutional issues? Or is it just a prudent move by the HR?

Tozzi: There is simply no consensus between member states on these issues. As said, this is a document approved line by line by all 28 member states and the Commission, not a wish list of the HR/VP.

TIS: This document shows that the EU has travelled a long way from the 2003 Security Strategy to the Global Strategy – from a reactive, limited and generally securitised approach, which in many ways still leaned on the US unipolar moment, to a proactive, ambitious and comprehensive approach which envisages an independent leadership role for Europe in the world. However, in the current post-referendum context characterised by inward-looking tendencies and growing nationalism and populism across Europe, will a crisis-ridden Europe be able to take on this role? What is needed to fulfill this potential? Do you think the Strategy can relaunch the European integration process?

Now that the Strategy has been positively received by the European Council, what concrete initiatives can we expect to see implemented?

Tozzi: The European project is in deep crisis. I do not think that foreign policy can relaunch the project or significantly counter the trend of Eurosceptic populism. Action in areas such as the economy and migration are infinitely more important in this respect. However, foreign policy has – for some magical reason – been the area most immune from Euroscepticism so far. A recent Pew survey shows that 74 percent of Europeans – including 55 percent of British respondents – want to see more EU in the world. Hence, foreign policy is the area which is, perhaps, least politically divisive in the EU at the moment. That 28 member states managed to agree to a 51-page strategic document on foreign policy is something I struggle to imagine for instance on an issue like economic governance.

So, we do have a responsibility to do what we can to salvage the European project and, as small a piece of the puzzle as it might be, the EUGS hopes to be a contribution in this respect. For such a contribution to materialise however, forging a common narrative is not enough. We must now translate this into action, and plans at the time of writing – 10 days after the publication of the EUGS – are already underway. Security and defence is certainly one of the areas where follow-up action will be necessary. But it is not the only one. Making our development policy more flexible and aligned with the strategic priorities of the EUGS, or joining up across the EU policies, instruments and institutions in areas such as migration, energy and climate or counter-terrorism all require detailed follow-up actions.