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Strategy and Its Role in the Future of European Defence Integration

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Abstract

EU member states have proven incapable of clarity in their strategic planning, with their key strategic documents almost inevitably abstract and ambiguous. This is extremely unfortunate because without a clear catalogue of interests and an understanding of their location around the world it is impossible to determine a country's appropriate force structure, let alone conduct a coherent and effective foreign and defence policy. This lack of rigor in strategic planning is hurting European defence integration, as states are unable to have transparent and constructive debates about the interests they share. It would be wise to incorporate into the strategic planning process a model that allows for the capturing and quantifying of states' interests. Such a process might lead to the realization that EU member states share more strategic interests than is at first apparent.

Keywords: *France / Spain / Germany / Security policy / Military policy / European Union / Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)*

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Strategy and Its Role in the Future of European Defence Integration

by Manuel Muniz*

Introduction: Question and definitions

Do European countries have a clear sense of what their strategic interests are? Does the European Union (EU), as a whole, have a well-defined strategic posture? These are legitimate and relevant questions to ask, particularly at a time when changes in the international landscape such as those caused by the Arab Spring, the Great Recession or the US "pivot" to Asia are forcing many in Europe to re-assess their strategic priorities. The inability to answer such questions is at the core of the problems European defence faces both at the national and EU levels. Only a structured process of strategic reflection can lead Europe to clarity in this field and to further integration.

Definitions of strategy vary greatly. Some equate strategy with tactics and define it as the specific actions taken during battle. Others speak of strategy in such broad terms that it would be hard to deny anything a certain strategic allure. Perhaps being so imprecise is strategic in itself, as it cloaks the definer in the mystery and infallibility that only vagueness can provide. However, it is Liddell Hart's much more rigorous definition of strategy that is perhaps the most useful for the purpose of this paper. Strategy is for him "the art of distributing and *applying military means to the ends of policy*", and the role of grand strategy is, in turn, "to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war - *the goal defined by fundamental policy*".[1] What those goals should be, what should drive "fundamental policy", is thereby the central question for security and defence policymakers. Or, to put it differently, strategic planners should first and foremost understand their state's strategic interests, that is, the ones of greatest value to the state itself, the protection of which might require the use of force. This definition of strategy limits its scope to the realm of defence, which is appropriate not only in historical terms (the term "strategy" has its etymological roots in *strategòs*, the ancient Greek word for "general"), but also helpful for the purpose of having a consistent discussion about the subject.

In this sense, strategic interests are the drivers of the defence planning process, and the ones that should determine a country's force structure. Indeed, the planning process should always begin with the determination of an actor's strategic interests. That should be followed by an outline of the threats to those interests, the capabilities

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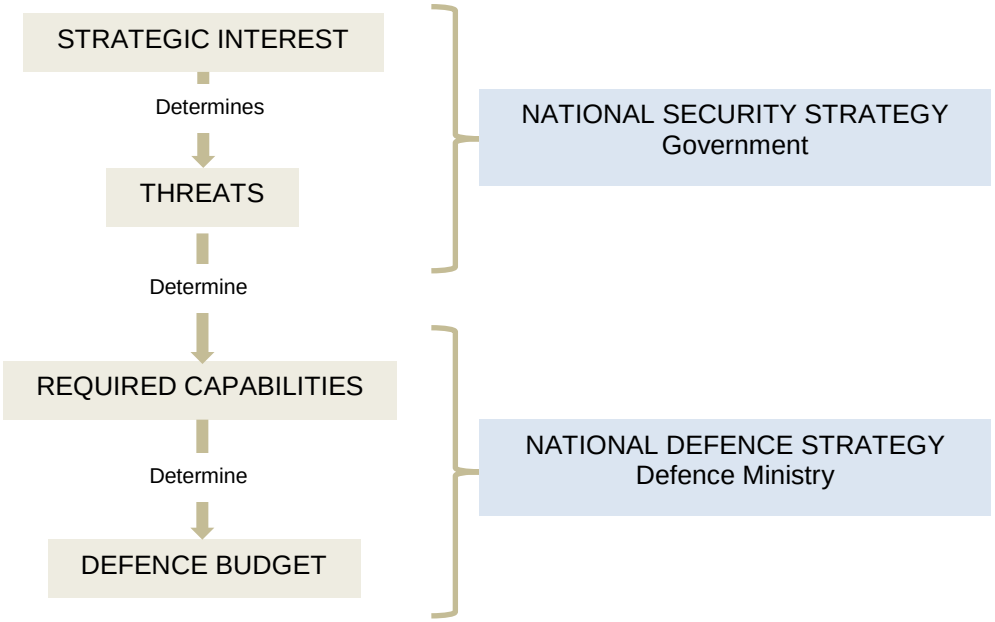
[1] Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy. The Indirect Approach*, Washington and New York, Praeger,1967, p. 335-336 (author's emphasis).

required to address those threats, and, finally, the defence budget to be requested from those that allocate it. Figure 1 below shows a simplified version of how a strategic planning process should look like.

Figure 1. The strategic process pyramid



Given that the European Union has, since the late 1990s, created common security and defence institutions, produced such an EU-wide strategic document as the European Security Strategy (ESS), and even deployed military missions around the world, it is also important to ask about the drivers of its actions. Hence, in Europe it is not only the strategic interests of states that should be the focus of study but also those of the Union as a whole. Do the interests of member states overlap to form areas of common EU interest? Or does the Union have specific interests that are perhaps connected to but fundamentally independent from those of its member states? Or, to bring this into policy perspective, when should the EU act through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and when should member states take full responsibility for a given security situation?

It is the contention of this paper that the lack of definition of strategic interests both at the national and supranational levels in Europe is so significant that it is preventing some of the questions listed above from being answered properly. If Europeans are ever going to be rigorous about their strategic planning, and coherent regarding what they want from the EU, they should put in place a two-tiered strategic reflection process that leads to the determination of both national and EU-wide interests. Only after the identification of such interests can a real strategy drafting process be started that could lead to an overarching framework for both national and European action.

1. Strategy making in Europe today: the cases of France, Spain, Germany and the EU

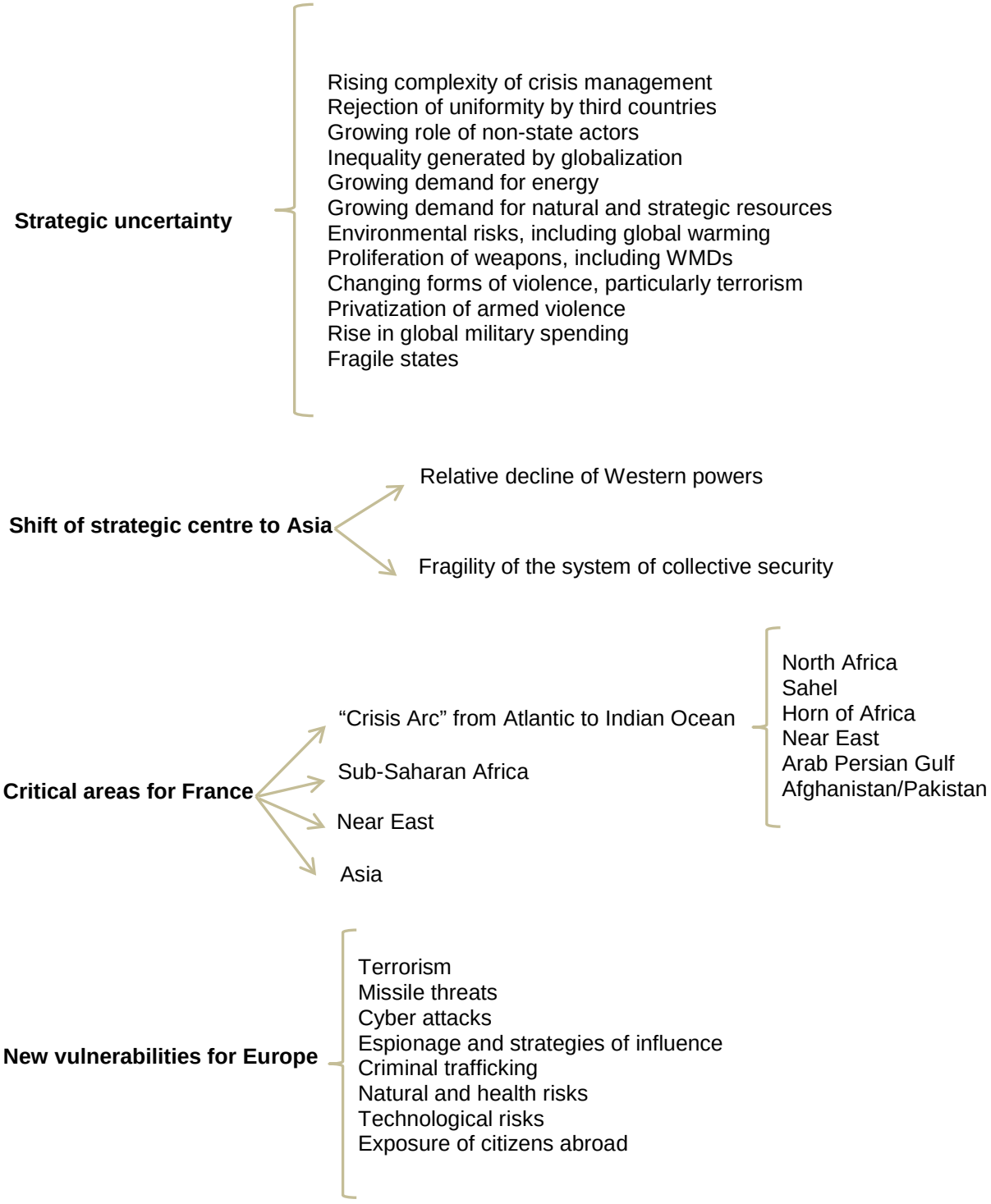
A brief look at formal strategic documents across Europe reveals little clarity when it comes to defining strategic (or national) interest. France, a country with a long tradition of military engagement around the world and with an extensive and well-funded planning process, shows worrying signs of confusion when addressing this issue. A look at France's 2008 and 2013 White Books on Defence leaves the reader wondering what the true drivers of the planning process are.[2] Both documents display a deep analysis of the strategic environment inhabited by France but there is no clear explanation as to why some trends are considered more important than others or, most importantly, why some of those changes represent a threat to France. The fact that strategic documents can speak of threats without indicating what they are a threat to is at the core of what is wrong with European strategic planning.

Figure 2 below shows, in a schematic manner, the main trends and threats identified by France's 2008 White Book. Perhaps of greatest importance to our analysis is the section titled "critical areas for France".[3] There, the White Book points to four geographic areas where the security of France is supposedly at stake. That enumeration is relevant because despite the re-assessment of the strategic environment carried out in the 2013 White Book, these areas have remained in place, meaning that they have been considered by strategic planners as the most important for France for at least the past two decades. And yet there is no explanation as to why this is so. One has to assume that France has some cultural connection to the "Afrique francophone", as well as significant pockets of French nationals living in these places, or major economic interests there. But these interests are never specified, nor are they pinned down geographically, nor are they properly tied to the threats that could put them at risk.

The closest that the 2008 French White Book comes to a definition of its driving principles is in the prologue signed by the then President of the Republic Nicolas Sarkozy. In it he says the following: "My two goals are to ensure that France remains a major military and diplomatic power, ready to take on the challenges congruent with our international obligations, and that the State has the capacity to guarantee the independence of France and the protection of all French citizens". Although it would be unwise to dispute that those are truly strategic objectives, it must be the case that France has interests more complex than the mere protection of its citizens. Surely France's interests are spread around the globe, do not always involve the life or safety of French nationals, and might require for their protection measures that go beyond classic territorial defence.

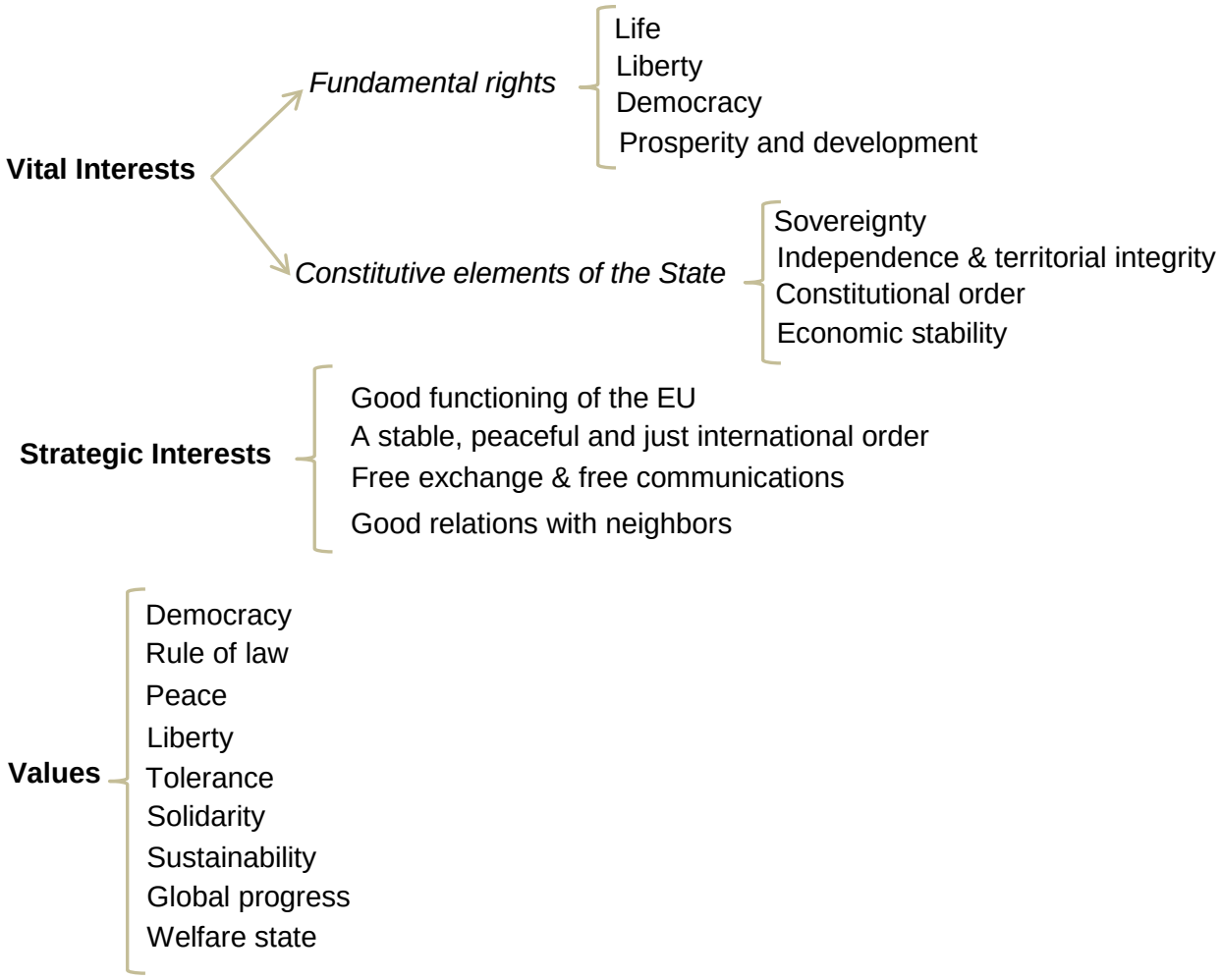
[2] *The French White Paper on Defence and National Security*, New York, Odile Jacob, 2008, http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=156934; *French White Paper on Defence and National Security 2013*, Paris, Direction de l'information légale et administrative, 2013, http://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/articles/livre-blanc-2013.
[3] Look at chapter 2 of 2008 White Book.

Figure 2. The French White Paper of Defence 2008. Trends and threats



Another country that produced a new security strategy in 2013 was Spain.[4] Its previous strategy had been published only in 2011[5] and was supposed to last over a decade, but significant changes in the country's strategic environment led its new government to scrap it and draw up a new one. However, the 2011 document made a greater, albeit ill-conceived, effort to define Spain's interests. Figure 3 below shows, again in a schematic manner, the breakdown of the country's interests according to the 2011 strategy.

Figure 3. Spain's interests according to its 2011 security strategy



That life, liberty or prosperity and development are defined as a vital interest to Spain gives us little information as to how that should relate to planning or to specific threats. Still more confusing is the fact that issues such as solidarity and sustainability are listed

[4] *The National Security Strategy. Sharing a Common Project*, Madrid, Gobierno de España, 2013, http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/NR/rdonlyres/9EE78C07-C971-440B-B297-3ABDD6394454/0/EstrategiaSeguridad_BAJA_julio.pdf.
[5] *Spanish Security Strategy. Everyone's responsibility*, Madrid, Gobierno de España, 2011, http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/ServiciosdePrensa/Post+it/EstrategiaEspanolaDeSeguridad.

as part of Spain's interest catalogue. Again, how all this relates to planning and specific policy remains a mystery. The 2013 Spanish security strategy is even less clear, with no catalogue of interests and only sporadic and disconnected references to the concept throughout the text.

Germany is another case that is worth mentioning. This is not only because of the scale of its defence spending but also because of its overall significance in the European project. Germany's inability to think strategically is now legendary. A look at Germany's security doctrine takes you to all places and institutions in the country except the Chancellery. In 2003 and 2011 the German Defence Ministry produced its *Defence Policy Guidelines*[6] aimed at establishing the principles that should govern the organization and actions of that Ministry rather than at setting overarching strategic principles. What could have come closer to a strategy was the *White Paper 2006 on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr* (the latter being the federal armed forces).[7] Yet, being drafted as it was by the Defence Ministry, it was much narrower in scope and clearly focused on the much-needed reform of the armed forces. There are of course historical and institutional reasons that explain why Germany has been unable to enter a deep process of strategic reflection, but the fact remains that Europe's largest country has been unable to produce a national security strategy since the end of the Second World War.[8]

This lack of a proper definition, let alone measurement, of an actor's interests is perhaps most painfully evident at the European level. The 2003 European Security Strategy[9] did little to address this problem as it tiptoed around the difficult matter of delineating the Union's strategic outlook. A glance at the text of the ESS reveals that there is only sporadic reference to interests. Interestingly enough the section on "strategic objectives" begins with an enumeration of threats. Again we see here the now common pattern of specifying threats without first determining what there is to protect. But of course problems with how the ESS is drafted do not stop there. As part of the Union's strategic objectives multilateralism is citied, which is controversial to say the least. Multilateralism is a means to something but surely not an objective in and of itself. Overall the ESS lacks a catalogue of EU interests that could then lead to a rigorous description of threats and of possible action to tackle those threats. Without that internal coherence it becomes an exercise of abstract reflection.

One could, however, argue that an analysis based solely on formal documents could be misleading. Public strategy documents tend to be discrete and it could be the case that they refrain from spelling out a state's strategic interests out of diplomatic correctness or an unwillingness to share such information with third parties. And yet

[6] Available in the Federal Ministry of Defence website: http://www.bmvg.de/portal/poc/bmvg?uri=ci%3Abw.bmvg.sicherheitspolitik.angebote.dokumente.
[7] Ibidem.
[8] For two excellent studies on strategies across Europe see Olivier de France and Nick Witney, "Europe's Strategic Cacophony", in *ECFR Policy Briefs*, No. 77 (April 2013), http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/europes_strategic_cacophony205; and Olivier de France and Nick Witney, "Étude comparative des livres blancs des 27 états membres de l'Union européenne: pour la définition d'un cadre européen", in *Études de L'Irsem*, No. 18 (2012), http://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/185008/2037037/file/Etude%2018-2012.pdf.
[9] *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf.

numerous interviews in France, Spain and Germany have revealed that policymakers around Europe struggle to arrive at a clear definition of their state's strategic interests at least as much as the formal documents they produce (see annex 1). Most interviews revealed a general lack of understanding regarding why those countries had supported the use of force in cases spanning the last two decades. Apart from fuzzy references to "helping our allies" or to "doing the right thing" there was little else. Sometimes, interviewees mentioned their "interests" in the region, for example when discussing EUNAVFOR Atalanta, the EU's antipiracy naval mission in the Horn of Africa. However, when pushed to define those interests, most seemed baffled at the request. It seems, quite simply, that European policymakers are making decisions regarding the use of force based on overarching or system-wide milieu goals (as opposed to specific "possession" goals that tend to benefit one sole actor), or quite simply without much strategic reasoning. Even if one is willing to accept milieu goals as a perfectly good reason to deploy military force under a UN Chapter VII mandate, what would be unacceptable is for those goals to remain so abstract that there is little connection between them and reality. Arguing that member states or the EU as a whole are acting, for example, for the good of the European Union and to further integration is in and of itself insufficient grounds. For a rigorous case would at the very least need to be accompanied by a detailed description of what a stronger EU would look like, and how that specific action makes such a prospect more probable. Again, this depth of reasoning is simply not present in European strategic thinking today.

2. Why is this important?

Being capable of thinking strategically is, as indicated previously, extremely important for states to develop the right capabilities. If Europeans do not proceed with rigor when planning their defence they might find themselves in a situation in which they cannot protect their most vital interests. Furthermore, at a time of significant budget constraints, not having watertight arguments about the need for a strong defence can only result in defence budgets being slashed. If a defence minister can only speak of fuzzy interests abroad, of abstract threats and of ill-defined goals for costly deployments, we will surely witness a prioritization of other spending over investment in security. Or to put it bluntly, if defence policy remains a field of speculation and abstract talk it will soon find itself incapable of achieving its most basic goals.

The above is reason enough to reconsider how strategy making is undertaken in Europe. But the fact that European states have decided to cooperate on defence matters brings with it a whole set of reasons in favour of strategic clarity and transparency. For example, still today when the EU debates military action in Africa, questions emerge regarding the importance of the region for the Union as a whole. German policymakers refer with suspicion to France's "special" (read here: "post-colonial") interests in the region, and insist that the protection of French uranium mining interests in Niger should by no means be a European-wide concern. The problem here, therefore, is not one of differences in attitudes towards the use of force (or strategic culture), but rather the EU member states' incapacity to speak clearly about their interests, and to engage in a structured discussion about where and when joint action would be desirable.

It is evident that a lack of strategic reflection at the national level is hurting the definition of truly European interests, and that is preventing moves towards further integration. If Europeans could agree, after an honest, transparent and rigorous debate, on a basic account of their common interests, they would surely be able to protect them better. As long as that is lacking, suspicion about the motives of partners suggesting European deployments will abound, and muddling through, with ad hoc interventions led by ad hoc coalitions, will remain the norm. Add to that the US pivot to Asia and falling military spending across the board, and Europe is in for a rough ride.

3. How can strategy making in Europe be improved?

A very basic process should be started to reduce strategic obscurity in Europe. The first step should be to put in motion a set of strategy drafting processes in EU member states. It would be important for those processes to be based on similar criteria, and to have the identification of national strategic interests as the main driver.

A breakdown of the concept of strategic interest helps capture its complexity, and enables some form of measurement of its intensity (Figure 4 below shows a simplified attempt at that).

Figure 4. Strategic interest model (simplified)

Interest	Components	Sources
Economic	Trade linkage Special economic interests Economic presence on the ground Expatriate community	Trade data Economic indicators (FDI) Expatriate community data
Institutional / Legal	Legal linkage Diplomatic entanglement Institutional presence on the ground	Treaties and agreements Diplomatic contacts Institutional presence on the ground Development data
Military / Security	Geo strategic value Security obligations Direct military presence	Doctrine and historical documents Parliamentary debates Official statements Interviews with policy makers History of military intervention
Political / Cultural	Historical ties Cultural connection (Language) Symbolic importance	Historical documents Parliamentary debates Interviews with policy makers Public opinion data

The overall idea is that interests belong to four broad categories: “Economic”, “Institutional/Legal”, “Military/Security” or “Political/Cultural”. Within each of those categories one finds issues of importance to states (called “Components” in Figure 4) such as the size of the expatriate community in a state or region, or the scale of trade with a certain country. Measurement of each of the components is possible by looking

at “sources”, which can be documents, indexes or others. For example, within the category of “Economic” interests one would find “Trade linkage” as a “Component”. This is so because trade linkage or density is part of the economic interests a state might have in another. Or to put it differently, the cumulative value of trade with a given state is an interest in itself, something of value to a country. The intensity of trade linkages can be measured by looking at data on trade between the state whose strategic interests we are assessing and other countries. By looking at the source (in our example figures or real trade between states) we can assess the intensity of economic bilateral relations.

Interests as defined and measured above are real, physical, as well as ideational or ideological. Most will not require the use of force for their protection but in some instances they might.

It is important to note that strategic interests as defined here will tend to manifest themselves in a palpable manner. Most will have some geographic rooting or manifestation. This means that a state should be able to map where most of its interests lie geographically. This is surely the case of economic, institutional and security interests. What this all means is that we should be able, with some degree of certainty, to map a state’s interests around the world. Such a map would be of great value when drafting defence strategy, when deciding on the launch of a specific mission, when determining the mandate of those missions, and even when setting broader foreign policy goals.

A second phase of this process should then involve an EU-wide debate about what constitutes a European interest and what does not. In essence this would be a deep review of the 2003 ESS, but also based on abundant work done at the national level. It seems reasonable to suggest here that areas of significant strategic overlap across EU states should be considered for EU-wide attention, and for future CSDP action if required. Areas or issues, on the other hand, where only one or very few member states have an interest, should remain the sole responsibility of those states. At the very least this process would produce a clear catalogue of member state interests and a solid foundation on which to construct a European strategic debate. Overall the EU is perfectly capable of having a strategy and of upholding its stipulations even if they require the use of force. There is no reason not to start such a debate as soon as possible.

4. Challenges and difficulties

A model like the one above faces significant methodological challenges. One is that interests are complex and interrelated. Complexity makes them hard to differentiate and to measure. Sources of data are, also, truly numerous. A second limitation is that some interests are transnational in nature and are therefore hard to pin down geographically. Another challenge is that of comparing the intensity of different kinds of interests. Given that strategy is, in essence, an exercise in prioritization, this must be addressed by any model that tries to arrive at practical conclusions. Whether these concerns are addressed satisfactorily will always be open to discussion. Furthermore, a model will not replace the need for strategic planners to weigh the different arguments

and magnitudes they are provided with. What a model does offer is the possibility of proceeding in a rigorous manner.

However, it is not the methodology that has been the main object of criticism when it comes to constructing a strategic interest model. In Europe it is the very concept of "interest" which is under attack. There is, indeed, the general perception that a soft or normative power should not view the world in interest terms. Such a view is too Bismarckian, too *Realpolitik*-oriented, too "modern" (in the old sense of the word!). In a postmodern Europe interests are not to be spoken of. Possession goals are not to be pursued. In a recent discussion, a high-ranking official in the EU said that we would "never see in Council conclusions any mention of *EU interests* abroad". The reasons for this are surely complex and would take us too far from our main argument but suffice it to say here that they have to do with Europe's history, and with the bizarre suspicion that clarity in the drivers of defence policy necessarily leads to conflict. It seems that for many in Europe intellectual underperformance is the only way to peace.

A further difficulty is that the strategic landscape a country inhabits is constantly changing. Any description of strategic interests would at most serve as a temporary depiction of that landscape. To reflect this dynamic element broad and flexible definitions would be needed, but this would run counter to the purpose of the model above, which is meant to provide a conceptual instrument to get to the clearest definition possible of a state's interests. The truth of the matter is then that the model suggested here would only provide a snapshot of a country's strategic outlook at a given point. However, the interests selected evolve very slowly in most cases. One would need to review the assessment every now and then, but medium-term planning, like most countries do once every legislature, would find the data provided perfectly useful.

Conclusions

Devising a model to define a state's strategic interests is no panacea to the challenges of drafting and executing strategy. It would be close to impossible to arrive at hard figures that could themselves translate into decisions on defence budget allocation or troop deployment. Deep knowledge and thick description of specific cases will always be necessary. A structured European debate, however, could bring some order and rigor into a field much in need of both. With sufficient resources and time policymakers could be, and should be, provided with some structured data on how to understand their country's interests. This could bring value to their decision-making process, and eliminate some of the all-too-familiar improvisation in European strategic thinking.

Such a debate about how to define the EU's strategic interests would enable, rather than hinder, the prospects for further integration in the field of defence. If strategic planning efforts are undertaken at both the national and the EU levels according to the model presented above, it might be possible to start thinking about the elaboration of a new and proper European security strategy or a European White Paper on Defence. Such documents could reflect both national and European-wide interests, delineate how far common action should go and allow for an environment of trust to develop among European partners. Without a prior exercise of deep strategic reflection, the

prospects for the emergence of a rigorous European strategic posture and of a well-structured and robust Common Security and Defence Policy, are dim. Indeed, European security and defence integration without some form of strategic guidance is improbable and, quite probably, undesirable.

Updated: 29 October 2013

Annex 1. Interviews

FRANCE				
Surname	**Name**	**Institution**	**Position**	**Interviewed**
Bentégeat	Henri	French Army / EU Military Committee (EUMC)	General (Ret) / Head of the French Chiefs of Staff and EUMC	03/07/2012
Ganascia	Jean-Philippe	French Army	Brigadier General (Ret) / EUFOR Tchad Force Commander	25/06/2012
Helly	Damien	EU Institute for Strategic Studies (EUISS)	Senior Research Fellow	03/07/2012
Howorth	Jolyon	Yale University	Visiting Professor	02/07/2012
Laïdi	Zaki	Sciences Po	Research Professor	02/07/2012
Lebeouf	Aline	Institut français de relations internationales (IFRI)	Research Fellow	12/06/2012
Nye	Joseph	Harvard University	Distinguished Service Professor	18/06/2012
Vasconcelos	Alvaro de	EU Institute for Strategic Studies (EUISS)	Director	27/06/2012
Not for attribution	Not for attribution	French Foreign Ministry	Directorate of the EU	25/06/2012
Not for attribution	Not for attribution	French Army	High Ranking Officer / Operation Épervier	07/12/2012
Not for attribution	Not for attribution	French Army	High Ranking Officer / EUFOR Tchad	26/06/2012

GERMANY				
Surname	**Name**	**Institution**	**Position**	**Interviewed**
Brantner	Franziska	European Parliament	Member of Parliament / The Greens	19/04/2013
Finkenbusch	Ulrich	German Parliament	FDP Parliamentary Group / Adviser for Foreign Policy	10/04/2013
Hasler	Jörn	German Parliament	FDP Parliamentary Group / Adviser for Security and Defence Policy	10/04/2013
Kähler	Thorsten	German Ministry of Defence	Rear Admiral. Director of Security Policy	12/04/2013
Overhaus	Marco	Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)	Senior Associate, EU External Relations Division	19/04/2013
Spatz	Joachim	German Parliament	FDP Parliamentary Group / Foreign Policy Spokesperson, MemberEU&Defence Committees	19/04/2013
Stelzenmuller	Constanze	German Marshall Fund of the US Berlin Office	Senior Transatlantic Fellow	04/04/2013
Tettweiler	Falk	German Ministry of Defence	Liutenant Colonel. Desk Officer, Security and Defence Policy Department	17/04/2013
Weber	Bernd	German Parliament	CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group / Speaker of the Working Group on Defence	11/04/2013
Wieck	Jasper	German Foreign Office	Director. Head of Defence and Security Policy Division	05/04/2013
Woelke	Markus	German Foreign Office	Deputy Head of Division (CSDP)	04/04/2013
Zimmermann	Volker	German Parliament	CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group / Member of the Working Group on Defence	11/04/2013
Not for attribution	Not for attribution	German Ministry of Defence	Security and Defence Policy	17/04/2013
Not for attribution	Not for attribution	German Chancellery	Security Policy	19/04/2013

SPAIN				
Surname	**Name**	**Institution**	**Position**	**Interviewed**
Ballesteros	Miguel Ángel	Spanish Army	General / Director of the Strategic Studies Institute (IEEE)	30/10/2012
Berenguer	Philippe	Spanish Navy	Joint Chiefs of Staff. Strategy and Planning Division	30/10/2012
Breijo Claur	Andrés Amable	Spanish Defence Ministry	Admiral / Former Director of EUNAVCO	31/10/2012
Cordón Scharfhausen	Carlos	Spanish Navy	Captain / Director Escuela de Idiomas del Ejercito (EIE)	29/10/2012
Domínguez Bascoy	Jerónimo	Spanish Navy	Admiral / Director of the Military School of Legal Studies (EMEJ)	07/11/2012
Horcada Rubio	Ignacio	Spanish Navy	Vice Admiral	07/11/2012
León	Bernardino	EU External Action Service (EEAS)	EU Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean	28/10/2012
Lista Blanco	Fernando	Spanish Navy	Admiral / Former Member of EUMC and EUMS	08/11/2012
Martinez Nuñez	Juan Francisco	Spanish Navy	Admiral / Joint Chiefs of Staff	30/10/2012
Martínez Valero	Valentín	Spanish Army	General	10/09/2012
Morenés	Pedro	Spanish Defence Ministry	Minister	31/10/2012
Solana	Javier	EU External Action Service (EEAS)	Former High Representative of the EU	10/11/2012

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