NOTRE
EUR●PE
JACQUES DELORS INSTITUTE IIIIIIIII

THE EU'S FOUR STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

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The US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement signed with Iran in 2015, the crisis in Ukraine, Russia's worrying gesticulations at the borders of the Baltic States, the conflagration of the Libya-Iraq-Syria axis, with its fearsome repercussions for Europe in terms of terrorist knock-on effects and the influx of refugees, the constant instability in the Sahel, the potential political and military confrontation between an Israel/Saudi Arabia/USA axis and an Iran/Syria/Russia axis, all against a backdrop of cyber threats, a rise in authoritarianism in Europe and the heightened unpredictability of US diplomacy: the EU's strategic balancing has rarely ever been so complex, unstable and worrying.

It should not come as a surprise then, that security matters both within and around the EU are among the predominant concerns of citizens and Heads of State alike. Since 2016, under the additional impetus of the Brexit shock, European defence become a popular topic and a political priority for the EU. Many initiatives, which were once impossible, are underway, often spurred on by France. The introduction of an element of flexibility in defence matters (Permanent Structured Cooperation) is the most serious example of this. In a historic first, the Commission even granted several billion euros to boost the European arms industry, through a

European defence fund which may reach €20 billion during the next European multiannual financial framework. At the French-German summit held in Meseberg on 19 June 2018, both countries also proposed the creation of an EU Security Council.

These initiatives are important. They do, however, focus on the technical (financial, institutional, capacity, industrial, etc.) aspects of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), without launching a debate on the purpose, objectives or even the principles of this policy. Yet **we believe this highly political debate is key to building a sustainable solution, and to making the EU a credible strategic player.** At least four challenges need to be clarified by the EU, in the most consensual way possible: the challenges of autonomy in decision-making, crisis anticipation, political influence and the coherence between our interests and our democratic principles.

1. The challenge of autonomy: Europe or NATO – possible combinations

The French have been familiar with the dialectic between European autonomy and Atlantic solidarity since the decisions made by General de Gaulle in the early

1960s. The gradual withdrawal of France from NATO's integrated military command structure occurred alongside the building up of French military independence capacity, including nuclear weapons, and yet France simultaneously remained a signatory of the North Atlantic Treaty and has demonstrated, when needed, unfailing solidarity with the USA, for example during the Cuba crisis or the first Gulf War in 1991.

In 2018, true to this dialectic, Emmanuel Macron's France continues to strive to combine national autonomy and European solidarity. General de Gaulle's major argument to justify French independence at the time was that France did not wish to be drawn into a war (by the USA) that was not its war to fight. Sixty years on and the same argument is valid, but in reverse: France implies that it does not wish to act alone in wars (Sahel) that are not only its own to fight but which contribute to the security of all Europeans.

This dialectic comes less naturally to Europeans, who have been used to decades of monopoly by the Atlantic framework for strategic analysis, decision-making and action. The consensus which gradually emerged on the creation of a European security and defence policy, from 1999, never questioned the precedence of NATO: the Treaty on European Union is very clear in this respect[1], stating that the "North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation".

It was NATO's supremacy which was behind the British vetoes from 2003 onwards to block an overly ambitious development of the CSDP. It was what was motivating NATO's oppositions to European attempts for political autonomy for decades. Recently, against all odds, US bureaucracy reiterated the official doctrine launched in 1999 by Madeleine Albright: no duplication with NATO's resources, no decoupling of the US and no discrimination against non-EU members. In other words: yes to the budget and capacity efforts of EU Member States (they are requested to devote 2% of their GDP to defence), no to the EU's decision-making autonomy within NATO (the famous EU Caucus remains a taboo topic). Outside NATO, Europeans are free to make their own decisions, at least in theory. The fear of a crisis with NATO in the event of a genuinely differentiated policy between the EU and the USA is a great deterrent.

And yet, since 2016, the notion of "strategic autonomy" has become one of the mantras of the EU's official texts on the Common Security and Defence Policy. It is among the objectives set at the creation of the European Defence Fund proposed by the Commission to strengthen Europe's industrial basis. It is found in all the important texts of the European Council on the Security and Defence Policy. Have Europeans found the magic formula to combine political emancipation and Atlantic alliance? Not necessarily.

Firstly, Europeans are stuck between two irrational strategies. Donald Trump's worrying, unpredictable and uncontrollable policy urges the EU to step up its strategic ambitions and seek collective counter-insurance. Following the US withdrawal from UNESCO launched under Barak Obama, President Trump is criticising all forms of multilateralism: withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord, criticism of the WTO with a veto on the appointment of judges, withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council, withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran. Will he go so far as to question NATO? These concerns lead Europeans to step up their efforts significantly with a view to consolidating their common defence policy. Yet conversely, Russia's worrying and brutal bullying tactics are a major obstacle in these attempts to achieve autonomy: after the annexation of the Crimea and the

2. Article 42-7 of the TEU: "If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation".

destabilisation of Ukraine by the Donbass, Europeans feel increasingly dependent on protection from the USA, and therefore NATO. Ultimately, this means treading water.

Secondly, for a long time Europeans have focused on the issue of autonomy in terms of military resources, command structures, strategic capacities, etc. These aspects are admittedly essential but can be resolved due to them being technical and budgetary in nature. Meanwhile, the real difficulty lies in autonomous decision-making. Is the European Union ready, for example, to break all solidarity with the USA now that Donald Trump has gone back on the Iran agreement? Is it willing to oppose the Israel/USA/Saudi Arabia axis which, against Iran, claims to champion western interests in the Middle East, including possibly through war? Is it in the EU's interest to maintain the cold war climate which is once again becoming the leitmotiv of experts, or must it come up with its own strategic approach, which is more complex and more in line with the confusion of globalisation?

To achieve this, a common foreign policy must be built, prior to any form of defence policy and based on an autonomy of information and analysis means (shared intelligence, space observation, Galileo) and a common analysis of the threats and security interests specific to Europe. The European External Action Service (EEAS) should be the source of this movement, and yet it is not. It is likely that in a vast majority of cases, the EU's strategic vision is identical to that of the Atlantic Alliance, and so much the better. **Yet this familiarity with NATO does not remove the need for Europe to build its own vision of the world.** It is in the 1% of cases in which our interests really differ that the European Union's actual autonomy will be measured.

2 . The challenge of anticipation: preventing crises rather than simply managing them

For decades, before the taboo of a common EU defence policy was lifted, the external relations of the EEC, and subsequently the EU, had the political aim, when there was an aim, of preventing conflicts. Due to its exemplary nature (successful reconciliation of France and Germany), European construction was already supposed to be an exportable model of reconciliation in itself. Through its foreign trade policy, it strengthened the integration of the third world in global trade, which was deemed the best possible prevention policy. Through its development aid policies, the EU was above all a major player in the economic take-off of third countries, mainly African nations, and as everyone knows that poverty facilitates war, official development assistance and humanitarian relief granted by the EU almost naturally contributed to preventing crises and promoting international stability. In other words, the EU had been conducting foreign and security policies for a long time without knowing it, a little like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain who discovered that he had unknowingly been speaking prose his whole life. There was even in this general preventive approach a certain distrust, or even a certain contempt for the other aspect of the question, that of managing conflicts, activities deemed old-fashioned and left to Member States' military and diplomatic apparatus.

However, the end of the cold war put an end to this clear cultural conscience. Under the leadership of Javier Solana, the premises of conflict prevention were adopted by the EU in December 2000. The Solana report made prevention the very essence of the EU and proposed a broadening of the traditional definition of this concept: prevention became a step in an overall and integrated EU policy in which the military and civil management of crises and post-conflict reconstruction/stabilisation are as important, if not more important. The EU enjoyed many instruments to prevent conflicts and consolidate the rule of law: predominantly financial instruments (European Development Fund, the Instrument for Stability, the instrument for democracy and human rights, to name but three, totalling more than €75 billion for the 2014-2020 period). Since the Lisbon Treaty, which created the EEAS, this body now employs

more than 6000 civil servants whose country analyses are supposed to provide European decision-makers with a substantial ability to anticipate crises. An embryonic European intelligence service exists within the Council (Intcent), a centre which analyses satellite images also exists in Torrejon (Spain) and a European think tank is located in Paris. In short, **this wide range of instruments should enable the EU to step up its ability to anticipate crises significantly.**

Yet the results do not appear to be that compelling. Despite a far-reaching reform conducted in 2000 to apply a strategic overhaul of the development policy and to streamline its management, the EU and each of its Member States are always outpaced by foreseeable crises which were not foreseen. There are many reasons for this impotence. The first and main reason is the Commission's lack of geopolitical vision, in particular with regard to official development assistance priorities. Naturally, the idea is not to reduce development assistance to a mere instrument serving the security and defence policy. Yet not considering how to use millions and even billions of euros paid over decades in this or that region which is constantly in conflict or this or that constantly unstable country (Kosovo is the most assisted country in the world per inhabitant), not waiting for the political feedback effects of development assistance budgets in the name of a philosophy dating back to the 1970s, inserting political conditionalities in cooperation agreements and not applying sanctions when these conditionalities are trampled underfoot by the recipient state, in short, refusing to scrutinise the criteria, mechanisms and balance sheet of the European official development assistance in a serious analysis, is not the best means of achieving prevention. The second reason concerns the institutional battles within the EU, between the Council and the Commission. Regardless of the dual role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, also Vice-President of the Commission, the general directorates in charge of development assistance remain

fiercely independent, even though the thematic priorities are negotiated with the States. The third reason is the differing views between Member States of Europe's role and political autonomy on the global stage, their reluctance to support any attempt for diplomatic integration, their obsession with the sovereignty of each Member State, which all contribute to a great extent to the EU's inability to anticipate crises and therefore define effective crisis prevention policies.

It is therefore not surprising that crisis prevention, which was once at the heart of European rhetoric, has taken a back seat, overshadowed by crisis management. It is true that changing everything within the EU – the "apolitical and a-strategic culture" of the Commission, the political correctness on development assistance and trade agreements, the retention of national diplomatic intelligence – would be much more difficult than the occasional external operation at a reasonable cost and a low intensity. **The CSDP, or in other words the management of other States' crises, blossomed in this way, partly due to the diplomatic idleness of Europeans and the failures of prevention policies**. Yet combining both crisis prevention and management, with renewed coherence between development assistance policies, trade conditions, support for the rule of law, and military intervention capacity when necessary, should be the priority for the EU's external policies.

3. The challenge of influence: crisis management or a driving force behind globalisation?

Europeans have accumulated fifteen years of external action under the EU banner, i.e. a little less than thirty civil and military operations. Some of these really made a difference: the fight against piracy off Somalia, operation Atalanta, which almost fully eradicated the threat and restored a degree of freedom of circulation for shipping. Another example is the protection of refugee camps resulting from the civil war in Darfur, in 2007, which

mobilised more than 3000 soldiers. Other operations are less spectacular and yet effective in terms of crisis pacification: in 2008, the EU's civilian observers oversaw, with the OSCE, the implementation of the ceasefire agreement between Russia and Georgia.

This is all very useful, but gives rise to a feeling of dissatisfaction. This outcome is significant in operational terms but remains highly lacking in terms of sustainable political influence. Yet European citizens, who in opinion polls are asking for Europe to play a more predominant role on the international stage[2], are entitled to demand clarification on the EU's external action policies: what is the aim of these actions? What are the results?

First of all, this question covers the issue of crisis recovery. Europeans know how to intervene to mitigate violence and the suffering of populations but do not resolve crises in the long term. Worse still, the crises often abate under the effect of these interventions, then resume as soon as the external forces leave. While this is true for the EU, it is also true for most western operations since the end of the cold war. Neither Afghanistan (where the EU provided a police mission to support the NATO military operation for almost a decade, until 2016), nor the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (in which no fewer than three training missions with the Palestinian police force and crossing control missions in Rafah were conducted), nor in Iraq, (for which the EU developed an external training mission with the Iraqi police), nor the Sahel (where an EU mission is conducted in Mali to train the Malian armed forces), nor in Syria or Libya (where the EU itself is absent but in which several Member States are militarily involved), none of these recent crises has given rise to major diplomatic initiatives by the EU. Some peace talks are even conducted without Europeans being present (for Syria in particular). Naturally, EU has taken the lead in the diplomatic management of two major crises: in Ukraine, with talks as part of the "Normandy Format",

and in Iran, with the successful conclusion of the nuclear agreement in July 2015. Yet with the exception of these two crises, which remain unresolved, the EU is rarely considered to be anything other than a funding body, on an equal footing with the World Bank. Yet putting European soldiers at risk and allocating major budgets to external operations, without any long-term strategic vision for the pacification of the region in question, at the risk of having to start from scratch every ten years, is not only inefficient, it is absurd. Europeans should therefore work on developing real EU diplomatic creativity, in ground-breaking areas for the West.

Secondly, the question concerns the type of international order that the EU wishes to support through its external action. What type of security system is the best fit with Europeans' values and interests? Should emphasis be placed on championing the interests and leadership of the West, as opposed to the "Others"? Should European strategic interests be moulded around those of the USA, without asserting any specific features? Or should we attempt to build up a global governance which includes the different power clusters, including our own, in a set of collective rules and institutions? In other words, **is the aim to support a failing western supremacy, to champion a Europe-specific identity, or to build a more mixed new world order**, by sharing with others the elements of economic and political power? "The West above all", "Us too" or "All together"? This is a fundamental question on which there is no debate.

The third point of the question concerns the EU's role in globalisation. The very idea that Europe could enjoy a political role through the EU, somewhat like the USA or China, is not obvious to everyone. Yet, if Europeans are not at the negotiating table to discuss the future international situation, who would be an advocate of their model, identity and interests? Citizens are entitled to hope that Europe will have its say in the drafting of future rules: not only in the diplomatic

2. Daniel Debomy, "Allegro ma non troppo : les opinions publiques à la fin de 2017", Brief, Jacques Delors Institute, March 2018, in French only

management of crises which affect them (in Europe, the Middle East and Africa), but also in terms of the major challenges of the future, namely artificial intelligence, cyber-security, genetic revolutions, world governance, etc., as it was able to do for climate change. In this respect, the CSDP becomes a necessary but insufficient step and condition so that we do not disappear off the world map of influential political powers.

4. The challenge of democracy and coherence: interests or values?

The age-old dilemma of successfully combining security interests and respect for democratic values is not straightforward. For western democracies, values are, in theory, the most important element to limit the hard-line advocacy of interests of power, which are conversely favoured by non-democratic regimes. Yet in the era of globalisation, there appears to be an increasingly gaping chasm between these two objectives of interests and values.

Europeans are often mired in a terrible confusion with regard to their foreign policy. In Egypt, by supporting the military coup of General Sisi, we banked on the stability of the regimes and alliances in place, to the detriment of respect for democratic electoral rules. The fight against Islamist terrorism often takes us far from our principles. Our relations of friendship and cooperation with Saudi Arabia and our silence on the abuses committed by this regime in Yemen are a prime example of this. As regards Libya in 2011, the values or interests we were championing are not clear, while the state of total disaster which the country is experiencing five years on does not exempt us from addressing the question of our responsibilities. The difficulties are even clearer in Turkey. How can our advocacy of the rule of law and our alliance with Turkey through NATO be reconciled? How can the denunciation of the ultra-authoritarian regime enforced by Erdogan since 2016 be reconciled with the dependence we have created with regard to this country in the handling of the issue of Syrian refugees? How can the brutality committed by Turkey on the Kurds be denounced, without pretending to support their cause all the way, because everyone knows that the West does not and probably will not have a clear position in favour of an independent Kurdistan? In more general terms, in our external action, how can we be sure that our current allies, in whichever crisis in the Muslim-Arab world, will not become our enemies in the future?

Indeed, this is not a new development. For a long time, the foreign policies of democracies have been forced to choose the lesser evil in crises of increasing complexity. Yet these contradictions are coming under greater fire from public opinion, including our own, particularly when no public communication provides clarifications, when our explanation is nothing short of an embarrassed silence or when our collective rhetoric remains that of the properness and exemplarity of democracies. Instead of denying the complexity of the crises and of the responses they require, at the risk of bolstering criticism of the hypocrisy of democracies and the confusion of values, **European diplomacy would stand to gain so much credibility if it accepted to acknowledge, as honestly as possible, our dilemmas and the difficult choices which are ultimately made.**

Yet recently, the dilemma between championing interests and/or values is raging within the European Union itself. Ultimately, what are we defending in our national, NATO and European defence policies? In the foreword of the North Atlantic Treaty, Member States are "*determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law*". Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty states that: "*The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities*". In other words, can we want common defence with authoritarian regimes (Turkey in NATO), or regimes which officially breach these democratic values

(Poland, Hungary and others)? Must European citizens be ready to die to defend the Turkish regime or the authoritarian and xenophobic power currently in charge of Poland? This is, of course, a conundrum, but in refusing to consider these questions in their complexity, in wanting to deny the strategic confusion which now underpins the ambiguity of threats, we run the risk of betraying all that we are supposed to defend.

Conclusion

Hit by globalisation which is disruptive in many ways, Europeans are already aware of some of their mistakes and their illusions.

Their mistake is their inaction. The policy of strategic abstinence, which has allowed us to focus on the economy and brought about so much wealth for us during the cold war and up to the turn of the century, has now become the main European strategic stumbling block. While we never wanted to manage the Middle East, we are on the front line of the repercussions of this conflict, as we would be in the event of unrest in Iran following the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement. Refugees are the embodiment within Europe of conflicts outside Europe, in which we have let others intervene for sixty years. In short, inaction has done us a disservice: **we can only applaud the relaunch of European defence, because it bears witness to a collective wake-up call with regard to the strategic imperative that citizens are now calling for the EU to address.**

Our illusion is that of our exemplary nature. We believed, through the excellence of our European model, through our "transformational" policy, through enlargement, through trade, through our success even, that we could change our neighbours' strategic environment. In reality, the opposite has occurred. **Our drive to transform the exterior has been reversed, this exterior is now disrupting the EU and is transforming us in the worst possible way.** Not only through terrorism or refugee movements, but through an insidious political contagion, a fearsome attraction to populist authoritarianism which affects a significant proportion of European citizens. Our own democratic system is now in danger.

The consequence of this observation is simple: European defence is not merely made up of strategic threats, external interventions, military capacity, technological innovations and industrial excellence. As **the greatest threat that Europeans face today is the challenging of European democracy itself,** the common defence policy can no longer ignore this political dimension. It must serve the promotion and defence of an organisation model, an identity against the global backdrop, of our specific means of conducting peace and war. This is the only way that we can continue to count in tomorrow's globalised world.