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Article Summary and Comment

Analysis of Ion Berindan's article "Not another 'grand strategy': what prospects for the future European security strategy?"

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Summary

In the article, Berindan analyses the first two documents on the security strategy of the EU, and assesses whether they (should) represent a form of "grand strategy". More specifically, having proposed a definition of "world power", he asks if the EU presents such characteristics and therefore if it needs a grand strategy.

Since the very first pages, Berindan makes it clear that he considers premature for the EU to possess a grand strategy, as it is not yet a world power; instead, he believes the Union should focus on developing less ambitious but more feasible security policies, with the ultimate aim to actually become a world power.

To support and express his thesis, Berindan starts by examining the first European Security Strategy, issued in 2003 (thereafter, 2003 ESS). He argues that the document clearly adopts a grand strategy approach, as its features are compatible with the definition of grand strategy given by authors like Liddell Hart or Bassani.

However, Berindan raises the attention on the particular context in which the 2003 ESS took the form of a grand strategy document. He notes that until the late '90s the EU was planning the acquisition of the military means to deal with future crises, but the 9/11 terrorist attacks changed its stance. In the wake of the shock, and as a way to restore good ties with the US following the transatlantic diatribe over the invasion of Iraq, the Union adopted the 2003 ESS by giving it a grand strategy form similar to its American equivalent, the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS). In particular, as the 2002 NSS, it focused on threats such as terrorism, WMD proliferation, and similar "asymmetrical" threats. Still, the author notes that the 2003 ESS had its specificities: first, it included a human dimension absent in the US counterpart, mentioning problems like malnutrition and disease; second, it stressed the concept of multilateralism, in contrast to the unilateral approach of the Bush administration.

But in general, the 2003 ESS turned out to be significantly different from what it was expected to be: instead of being the starting point to give the EU its own autonomous capabilities based on adequate military forces (as envisaged in the 1998 St. Malo Declaration), the document significantly diverted from its original intentions and concentrated on threats that were not manageable by (exclusively) military means.

Moreover, Berindan observes that the enlargement to the east and the launch of the ESDP[1] posed some problems. As a matter of fact, by 2003 the enlargement had yet to be completed; therefore, the ESS was adopted by 15 members, but it was meant to be applied to 25 states. Besides, the new eastern members had a more traditional conception of security that did not correspond to the "enlarged" one contained in the 2003 ESS, and were much more keen on following the stance of NATO / the US; as a result, some contradictions emerged and the EU's security policy became closer to the American one.

Berindan also claims that along this process, the EU failed to develop its own specific strategic culture, distinct from that of the single member states and of NATO. Instead, its approach to security remained somewhere in the middle between an authentic European one and a transatlantic one based on NATO; more in the specific, to avoid superposing its role with that of the Atlantic Alliance, the Union was forced to abandon the St. Malo objectives to establish its own military means, and this ultimately resulted in its characteristic preference for soft power.

In short, according to the author, the 2003 ESS was mainly used to restore the ties with Washington; and was also adopted too early. As a result, the document represented a lost opportunity to give the EU its own military instrument and more autonomy from NATO and the US; as well as a new and unique pan-European strategic culture deprived of the elements that would risk to compromise the Union's action in Africa and Asia by making it appear as a form on colonialism. As such, he remarks that the document was not suitable for giving the EU a world power status.

Berindan goes on by taking into exam the next EU security-related publication, namely the 2008 RIESS (Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy). He notes that it was not meant to substitute the 2003 ESS, but to strengthen it; however he also states that there are significant differences between the two.

First, he observes that the threats identified in the two documents do not coincide. Some were present in both (terrorism, WMD proliferation, organised crime), some were included in the RIESS but were treated separately from the others (failed states, regional conflicts) and others were added (cyber-security, energy, climate change). As most of them could not be solved by a single actor alone, the RIESS maintained the multilateral approach of the 2003 ESS and further stressed it.

Second, and most notably, Berindan points out that the grand strategy approach of the ESS was no longer present in the RIESS. A first signal is that the document did not consider the need to create a strategic culture unique to the EU, which implies abandoning a grand strategy aim (as this culture

[1] European Security and Defence Policy.

would be essential in developing a true grand strategy). Again, the RIESS did not feature the global scope of the previous document, as it concentrated on the Union's neighbourhood. Lastly, it raised the issue of the actual capabilities in a more specific way than the 2003 ESS did.
On this basis, Berindan considers the RIESS not simply as a reinforcement of the ESS, but as an actually different approach to security strategy.

The author continues by providing another example of a document more capable of illustrating the real capabilities of the EU, namely the 2004 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Being more specific both in geographical and thematic terms, he considers it more suitable for the purpose of the Union's security, as it did not have grand strategy ambitions. In particular, he praises the way it adopted a practical approach to the relation with two of the most important neighbours of the EU, Russia and Turkey.

Then, Berindan examines the instruments meant to implement the EU's security policy, as the ESDP and the various institutions set up in that context. He observes that the Union effectively developed a number of instruments, notably to grant stability, peace and security at the international level with the aim to improve its own domestic security; but he notes that these actions were often affected by an excessive fragmentation, which in turn is the symptom of a lack of strategic vision. He believes that the effectiveness of such measures is of little relevance if it does not contribute to the establishment of a common strategic vision, and that despite some success, the EU's policy was still too dispersed and generic to represent a true strategic approach.

Again, Berindan analyses the emphasis on multilateralism, deemed necessary to effectively solve much of today's challenges. However, he notes that in most cases the EU failed to actually behave in a multilateral way, as it simply proposed to its partners a set of norms to which they were asked to adapt in order to reach a deal with the Union. As it practically sounded like a unilateral imposition, this method proved to be ineffective; especially with those states that were not eligible to join the EU and therefore had little if no incentive to conform to its rules. Arguably, this stance proved to be even counterproductive, as it damaged the image and the credibility of the Union.

In regard to changes in the international environment and to military interventions by "coalitions of the willing", Berindan expresses his concern over the fact that such initiatives harm the EU's internal cohesion on security issues by enlarging the gap between members who are capable /

willing to act and those who cannot / do not want. He advocates for more inclusive and integrated EU capabilities to be set in the future strategy documents.

The author then examines the EU's lack of proactivity in international affairs. As major events often bring division among member states, the Union's ability to adopt a grand plan is often compromised, especially after the most recent enlargement. As an alternative, he suggests trying to find a common ground: states should seek to anticipate problematic international changes so to prevent them and the division they could provoke; this way, the EU would become less reactive and more pro-active.

In conclusion, Berindan affirms that the EU has still to become a world power, but that since the 2003 ESS it aims to be one. To serve this purpose, he suggests to avoid premature grand strategy documents and to focus on sectorial strategies instead; in particular in regard to Russia and Turkey. He thinks the Union should establish geographic priorities, develop instruments to reduce internal division and form a common strategic culture. In his opinion, the EU should also improve its multilateral approach, by pre-determining which policies to implement and by accepting initiatives from other parties in place of trying to lead them every time; all with the aim to boost its image and soft power. He concludes by saying that these (and other measures) would allow to gradually transform the EU into a world power; as they do not intend to change the world, do not raise unrealistic expectations, and are sufficiently restricted in scope to be flexibly adapted.

Comment

Berindan's article examines a series of related (and much debated) issues: whether the EU is a world power or not, if it should possess a grand strategy, the nature of its security-related publications, and the measure it should take to become a world power possessing a proper grand strategy.

A first point that can be discussed is what Berindan conceives as "grand strategy". He is correct in identifying it as a strategic dimension that is ampler than others in both scope and means, as it goes beyond the exclusively military aspects so to include diplomatic, economic, technological and other issues and means. In fact, relevant authors agree with this vision; Luttwak, for instance, considers it

as the strategic level of international relations (even though grand strategy and international politics do not coincide[2]).

However, Berindan is wrong in considering it as a dimension belonging exclusively to "world powers", defined essentially as states capable of modifying the international system at their will. Along this logic, he adopts Bassani's conception of grand strategy as a structured combination of resources and methods meant to realize a desired vision of the world; in other terms, it would be possible to talk of grand strategy only if there is a proactive stance, a deliberate aim to change the international scene.

Now, this interpretation risks to be restrictive; as there is little or no reason to affirm that only world powers can possess a grand strategy. In fact, Luttwak states that it can refer to both the doctrine of a state or to the highest level of strategic analysis[3], but nothing allows to affirm that it is exclusive of a world power.

Defined simply as a combination of means to achieve a series of objectives on the international scene, it is clear that even a small power can have its grand strategy. Naturally, the grand strategy of a "world power" will be broader in term of resources, purposes, and geographic boundaries; but any state can have its own grand strategy, no matter its power. On this basis, it is also evident that the willingness to shape the world is not a necessary component of grand strategy. It can be an objective (for great powers), but it is not one of its essential constitutive elements. And in any case, even a small power can attempt, with its limited means, to change the world as it prefers.

According to these considerations, the question to determine if the EU is a world power changes its importance. Berindan suggests that only a world power can / should have a grand strategy; and since the EU is not a world power, he claims a grand strategy is unnecessary for it.

The issue of defining the Union's "power" has been widely discussed: normative power, soft power, civil power are all labels that have been proposed to qualify the power of the EU, as well as to determine whether it exerts power or influence. But the important distinction is based on the means, the methods, and the objectives. As a result, the EU can be a power even if it mainly employs civil means (diplomacy, economy) instead of military ones; it can act with effectiveness even without employing military force, but only civil methods or a combination of military and non-military ones ("smart power"); its objectives have not necessarily to be "civilising", and the existence of the CSDP[4] does not imply a militarization of objectives, as (despite its name) it does not represent a

[2] See Luttwak, 2001, chapter 13.
[3] See Luttwak, 2001, introduction to part III.
[4] Common Security and Defence Policy.

form of common defence based on establishing of a single "EU Army", but simply a form of cooperation between states in the defence domain.
This shows that the EU can mobilize a range of tools to achieve its goals; therefore, it can have a grand strategy, no matter what "type" of power it is. As such, grand strategy is not the prerogative of a world power as Berindan suggests.

Such considerations lead to the issue of the nature of the 2003 ESS and 2008 RIESS. Berindan criticizes the first as being an example of grand strategy unsuitable for the EU, as it is not a world power; and praises the second for being less broad and therefore more adapt to the Union. But as it has been observed, the appropriateness and effectiveness of a grand strategy does not depend on the type of power the EU is, nor on its intention to actively modify the international scene to its will. As such, it is difficult to criticize the ESS by saying it is a grand strategy, and consequently superfluous for the EU. What can be stated is that it may be too ambitious given the means of the Union, whereas the RIESS may be more feasible; but it cannot be criticised for its very nature of grand strategy. Instead, what can be stated about the two documents is that they are more declarations of the Union's general objectives rather than actual strategies linking means to goals. So, the critic may be the opposite of Berindan's one: the problem is not that they are strategies, but on the contrary that they are not.

The author's claims that a grand strategy is premature for the EU are probably also linked to the expectations on the CFSP[5] / CSDP and the misconceptions it generated, often diffused even among scholars.
The establishment of these initiatives (and their very name[6]) led many to believe that the Union wanted to act as a great power, a proper international actor employing the full spectrum of means (including military ones) to achieve its objectives.
But in reality, this ambition never existed. The CFSP is not meant to be a true EU-level foreign policy, but is simply a political engagement to attempt to find a common position on international affairs; notably, it is not managed through communitarian methods but with intergovernmental ones. As for the CSDP, it does not aim to create a "EU Army" for the common defence, neither it is a NATO-like military alliance; instead, it is simply a form of cooperation among states on defence matters.

[5] Common Foreign and Security Policy.
[6] See De Wilde d'Estmael, 2011, 24.

The two security publications that Berindan examines are perfectly consistent with that, as they do not contain any great power ambition and are generally commensurate to the Union's means.

A problem linked with this aspect is that grand strategies are traditionally applied to a state. As the EU is a unique political entity located somewhere in the middle between an ordinary international organization and a federal state, applying the concept to the Union is difficult, and maybe even inappropriate; as the very nature of the EU makes it difficult to develop the solid bases for a grand strategy.

In regard to this aspect, Berindan correctly observes that its action is often affected by fragmentation and lack of common strategic vision. But this is practically inevitable, as foreign and defence policies remain under the competence of the member states, and the CFSP / CSDP are based on intergovernmental methods were unanimity is (generally) required. Considering the EU counts 28 members[7], it is extremely difficult to develop a common strategic vision going beyond generic declarations supporting the core values of the Union (democracy, human rights, peace, etc.). This is even more true when considering the different cultures and priorities of the members: the eastern countries are concerned of Russia and close to the Atlantic Alliance, Mediterranean states are focused on immigration and economic problems, Scandinavians are attached to pacifism, France has interests in Africa, and so on. Also, as Berindan notes, the Union has always been careful not to interfere with NATO's role (on the bases of the "three Ds"; no discrimination, no decoupling, no duplication), and this denies the acquisition of proper military means and roles by the EU. Thus, as long as the structure of the EU remains as it is, it will be almost impossible to develop a more solid grand strategy.

All the previous observations are particularly interesting in the light of the most recent EU security publication, the 2016 Global Strategy (GS). As a matter of fact, the document adopts a stance that Beridan would likely define as "grand strategy", but notably it also contains some of the measures he suggested for the next EU security plans in order to make of the Union a world power.

As noted, the document has an ample scope, in both geographic and thematic terms. It indicates the common principles and interests of the EU, stating that "[p]rincipled pragmatism will guide our external action in the years ahead[8]" (the use of the plural is somehow significant, as it can indicate both solidarity among members states as well as the fact that a common position is practically difficult to reach). Among these, there are peace, security, democracy, unity, and the rule of law

[7] If the UK is still counted as a member even after the "Brexit" vote; after all it still has not officially departed from the EU.

[8] 2016 Global Strategy, 8.

based on multilateralism. It is notable that the GS indicates the Union's priorities, especially its own security, state and social resilience to the east and south, and integrated conflict resolution. This is symptomatic of a certain degree of "passive" reactivity in the EU approach to foreign affairs, as Berindan already pointed out, since it is clearly a reaction to the recent conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, Libya and the migrant crisis; but there are also indications of the willingness to adopt a more active stance in the world.

In the specific, in regard to security the GS calls for more capacities to dissuade external threats, act autonomously from NATO, and protect member states; while reaffirming the primary role of the Alliance for Europe's security and the competence of member states on defence matters. The document examines many threats, including terrorism (again, a sign of reactivity in the aftermath of the attacks in Paris, Brussels and other places), cybersecurity and energy security; it also stresses the importance of resiliency, conflict resolution and economic development as means to ensure the Union's security.

In line with Berindan's views, the document describes the Union's position and initiatives in relation to Russia, Turkey, and the transatlantic partnership; but it also examines the relations with all the other parts of the world, while calling for more specific documents to deal with each region or issue. This, and the intention to play a more important role on the international scene, means that the GS adopts a "grand strategy" stance that is contrary to Berindan's suggestions. Finally, in conformity with his article, the document calls for more cooperation in defence issues, especially in developing a European defence industry.

To summarize, the GS follows some points envisaged by Berindan, but it takes a broad "grand strategy" approach that is contrary to his opinions, as it would be premature given the EU is not a "world power". But apart from the fact that it is debatable whether the Union wants to be a world power or not, considering the previous observations on the fact that is needless to be a world power to have a grand strategy, this is not a problem *per se*. The actual limit is that they may be too broad and ambitious for the means the EU currently has at its disposal.

In conclusion, Berindan's article correctly catches many tendencies and weak spots in the security policy of the EU, and provides some valid suggestions; but it has a major flaw in the fact that it considers grand strategy as a prerogative of world powers, whereas it has been observed that this is not strictly necessary.

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