

A Few Fundamentals of EU Foreign Policy

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What are the fundamentals of EU foreign policy? That seemingly academic question will take center stage later this year when the EU kicks off a strategic review of its role in the world. Catherine Ashton, the EU's foreign policy supremo, who steps down this year, will launch a process to allow her successor to present a comprehensive document in 2015 on how the EU should reply to the big strategic challenges of the twenty-first century.

Many observers and think tanks have tried to identify the questions that such a process should answer. Another good starting point for an exercise of this kind is to look at some of the underlying truths of the EU's current strategic situation.

That approach reveals that foreign policy strategizing is about more than the mechanics of defining goals, means, and timeframes. Here are four suggestions for what Europe's policymakers should remember as they chart the course of EU foreign policy over the next eighteen months.

First, Europe continues to rely on the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Europeans from all kinds of political backgrounds often forget that, from the beginning, the entire European project could not have happened without a firm American security guarantee to keep it free from existential Cold War threats.

Today, America's extended nuclear deterrent is no longer about protecting Western and Central Europe from Soviet invasion; it is about keeping Europe free from political blackmail. Unlike Russia-reliant Ukraine, the EU benefits from having an ally that subsidizes its political freedom with considerable amounts of U.S. taxpayers' money.

Even under the best of circumstances, greater European contributions to the EU's own security posture could not replace America's role as security guarantor. Similarly, protecting the EU's vital economic and security interests across the globe will remain an American task for the foreseeable future. Anyone strategizing for a more advanced EU foreign policy needs to keep that in mind when drafting new external relations concepts.

The second fundamental is that foreign policy is the new "narrative." The founding narrative of EU integration was about creating the intra-European conditions for peace among nations that had been fighting each other for centuries. In the era of globalization, external peace is an increasingly important part of the EU's *raison d'être*.

In a globally integrated world, developments in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East directly affect Europe's well-being. Stability in the Korean peninsula is key to international trade flows, the

value of the dollar, and the price of oil. Terrorists eager to strike in Europe receive their training and logistical support from hideaways in the Sahel and South Asia.

Keeping the peace abroad is key to keeping the peace at home. It is no longer sufficient for the EU to focus on Franco-German reconciliation. Strategists need to finally debate foreign policy as an existential part of Europe's destiny, not as a side issue.

The third truth is that Europe's Eastern neighborhood is more important than its Southern one. Even though it is unwise to weigh up one region against another, priorities need to be set. In that calculation, East trumps South for a number of reasons. The EU's East is, for the most part, European, while its South is not. The East is not separated from the EU by the Mediterranean Sea.

The East is also home to the EU's only potential strategic adversary of some relevance: Russia. If the EU cannot get the relationship right with Russia and the countries in the former Soviet space, there will be no sustainable peace in Europe. There are no such make-or-break players in the South.

And the United States is less present in Eastern Europe than in North Africa and the Levant, making the EU more needed in its East than in its South. In short, the EU can gain much more by getting its Eastern neighborhood right than by trying to do the same in the Middle East and North Africa. The big exception is Turkey, which is of outstanding strategic importance for the EU's development.

Finally, technology will change almost everything. New technologies and their impact on strategy and foreign policy are almost always overlooked. From cybersecurity and big data to drones and the shale gas revolution, technological breakthroughs are reshaping perceptions of threats, war, and diplomacy.

Even more important, however, is technology's impact on questions of governance. Democracy itself is undergoing a technological revolution. Not only is social media a useful tool for organizing political participation, protest, and even uprisings. Technology enables globally networked elites to conduct real-time crisis management across borders and without much recourse to national institutions of representative government.

Global decision-making often requires tremendous swiftness—a swiftness that classical democracy struggles to keep pace with. EU foreign policy strategists need to address this new form of democratic deficit, which will compound the EU's existing crisis of legitimacy. In sum, EU foreign policy is about core issues of keeping the peace at home, reinvigorating European integration, and deciding how to organize democracy under extremely demanding conditions.

In the past, nothing much depended on EU foreign policy. That has changed. From now on, anyone who embarks on the task of drafting a strategy for EU external affairs is dealing with nothing less than the future of Europe.