

The EU's new Global Strategy remains wedded to an old-fashioned conception of foreign policy

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*Federica Mogherini presented a draft 'Global Strategy' on 28 June, which is intended to guide the EU's foreign and security policy. **Luigi Lonardo** argues that by stressing the need for unity among member states, the new strategy overlooks the risks that can occur from a centralised foreign policy. A more flexible approach to foreign policy would not only help to alleviate these risks, but would also be preferable on democratic grounds.*



A unified European foreign policy is the dream of advocates of closer integration in the European Union. The full cooperation required to carry out such a delicate and far-reaching policy is thus seen as a positive development by those who hope for a strong political union. It is therefore no surprise that [the new EU Global Strategy](#), released at the end of June, somewhat majestically states that "in a more complex world, we must stand united. Only the combined weight of a true union has the potential to deliver security, prosperity and democracy to its citizens and make a positive difference in the world".



Federica Mogherini presents the EU Global Strategy to NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg.
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However, while it may have made a great deal of sense to have a common foreign policy when the EU was first conceived, given Europe was still marred by the Second World War and the standoff between East and West brought on through the Cold War; it is now almost anachronistic to expect a united policy to develop and there is little justification for pursuing this goal at all costs. In reality, EU foreign policy should instead aim to be more decentralised, flexible and democratic – and this is something the new Global Strategy largely overlooks.

Such an approach means ultimately that the member states, rather than the EU, should be responsible for carrying out their own foreign policy. Federal or supranational entities, like the US or the European Union, determine which level of government is responsible for foreign policy. In the case of the US, foreign policy is centralised at the federal level. It is the country as a whole, rather than California or Michigan, that appoints ambassadors and declares war. But in the EU this division of competences is more fluid. While the EU should carry out a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), as per Article 2(4) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU); the core

aspects of state security remain the exclusive competence of each Member State (Article 4(2) Treaty on the European Union, TEU).

Should foreign policy be centralised?

The rationale for centralising foreign policy derives from a particular set of historical circumstances that no longer apply today. These include the geopolitical situation in the 18th and 19th centuries, which was of great importance for determining the American approach to foreign policy, the two world wars of the 20th century, and the Cold War, which marred post-war Europe.

But the world's economies, societies, and technology have changed much in the last few decades. The Global Strategy itself recognises that 'global growth, mobility and technological progress' have generated a number of new opportunities. But the strategy fails to fully grasp the wider consequences of these developments and the fact that they mandate a reassessment of the EU's existing allocation of competences.

One of the key arguments against allowing states to pursue their own foreign policies, for instance, is that if one state were to incur the wrath of an external country, the whole Union may suffer the consequences of a retaliation. This would be unfair in the sense that the other states comprising the Union would be obliged to suffer the ill-effects of the behaviour of just one of its members. The US Constitution, in empowering Washington in the area of foreign policy, follows this principle.

Yet changes in the international system make this argument obsolete. It is extremely unlikely, if not impossible, that any EU state would suffer a military retaliation given the system of military alliances that now exists, including NATO. This fear was far more real during the Cold War, but the fact that it is now no longer applicable necessitates a rethink as to what foreign policy is ultimately intended to achieve in Europe.

In contrast, a decentralised approach to foreign policy would distribute decision-making across many distinct centres, thus increasing the risk of foreign policy errors, but also reducing the scale of their consequences. As the risk analyst Nassim Taleb [illustrates](#), for instance, uniformity is risky: when applied to cases such as agriculture, for example, a state specialising in one crop may appear more efficient, but it exposes that state to potentially catastrophic consequences if something goes wrong, as with the Irish potato famine in the 19th century.

The EU possesses a legal mechanism enabling precisely this decentralisation. It is the principle of subsidiarity (Article 5(3) TEU), whose aim is to ensure that decisions are taken as closely to citizens as possible. And sticking to the principle of subsidiarity in the case of foreign policy, rather than aiming at an ever-increasing push toward a united front, would be the best way to alleviate these potential risks. EU member states already have diverging foreign policy objectives and concerns in many cases and they should be free to concentrate their resources on those issues that matter most to them.

And as a final point, there is the issue of democracy. Diplomacy has traditionally been a top-down process, in which vital decisions were imposed by a carefully selected elite. As the EU rules currently stand, the European Court of Justice is not allowed to review foreign policy decisions (Article 24 TEU) and the European Parliament plays little to no role in meaningfully shaping the international relations of the EU.

As such, there is ample motivation to bring decision-making closer to citizens through decentralisation and closer judicial scrutiny would enhance democratic control and protection for individual fundamental rights. Instead of focusing on the need for more unity, the EU's strategy should be to aim for a more flexible and efficient foreign policy, coordinated at the central level only when necessary, and capable of managing risks more effectively.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor

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