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Future Warfare: Possible Developments from a European Perspective

Dirk Rogalski and Karsten Struß

Optimism is most usually the effect of an intellectual error.

-- Howard Q. Quint

Although the quotation above by Howard Q. Quint is taken out of context, it indicates what might happen if our analysis of potential future developments proves incorrect. An analysis that ignores certain developments and potential future risks might find us caught by surprise and left unprepared to counter new threats. This paper is laid out to outline the European view on how the security environment might change in an increasingly globalized and multi-polar world, and how that might impact the future of warfare in the next fifteen to twenty years.

When we say “European View” we do not intend to claim that we speak for Europe in any official capacity. What we would like to share with you is our own interpretation of European strategic documents and scholarly work on this issue. The two main documents we consulted are the *European Security Strategy 2003* with its *2008 Implementation Report*, and the European Defense Agency’s *Long Term Vision for European Defence Capability and Capacity Needs 2006*. Taking these documents as the starting point, we will then analyze the developments within the different dimensions of the strategic environment that determine the design of any strategic vision.

Since the authors have worked with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) for the last twenty years at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, this interpretation will also reflect practical experiences. And of course you might expect a bit of a German touch. This is mainly because Europe still has a hard time coming up with a common view that is shared, accepted, and interpreted in the same way by all twenty-seven member states of the EU. “Unity in Diversity” is one of Europe’s greatest assets but also its greatest challenge when it comes to decision-making in high politics and crisis management.

Before we start to analyze what Europe’s vision for the midterm future is, we need to understand some particularities about the EU:

- The EU is not a nation-state. Its five hundred million citizens come from twenty-seven member states. The EU does not have a constitution but is based on treaties.
- The EU is not an alliance like NATO. There are many policy areas that fall under the auspices of supranational bodies like the European Commission and Parliament. Decisions by these bodies are treated as secondary legislation and are binding for member states.
- Decisions regarding security and defense, in contrast, have to be made unanimously by the member states. Up to now the EU has been unable to enforce common strategies, common positions, and joint action in the area of security and defense.

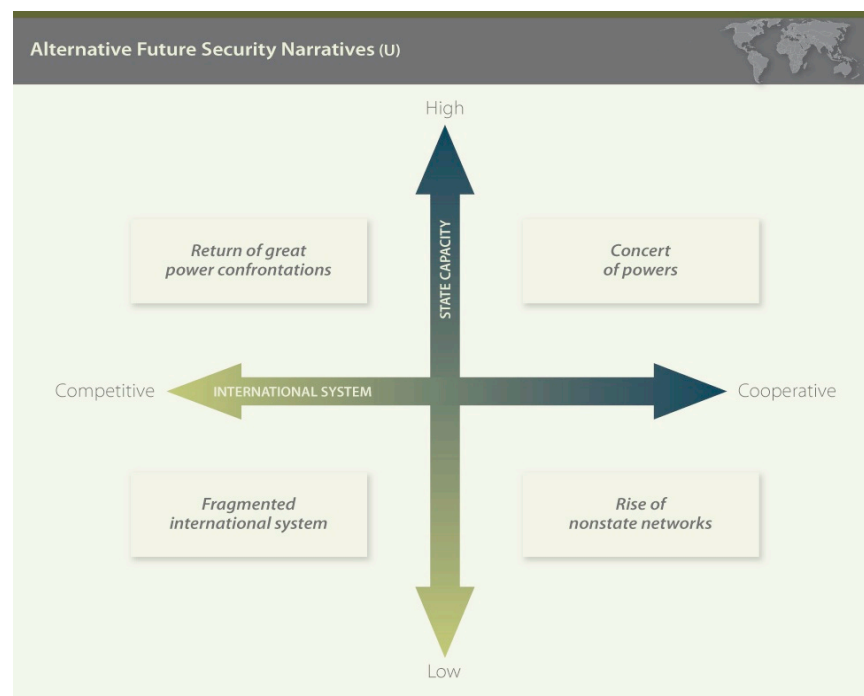
These characteristics show that the EU is based on effective multilateralism. Effective multilateralism has worked for the EU. The EU’s economic strength and the EU’s security depend on a functioning multilateral system and effective multilateral institutions. Whether this concept will still be valid in the future is inevitably subject to debate.

The return of power politics, perhaps triggered by unilateral decisions of major global players or the failure of multilateral institutions, is a direct threat to European security and prosperity. Unilateralism is an attack on European beliefs and threatens the very foundations of the EU. It might also endanger the most valuable strategic asset that the EU has provided to the US in the past decades—peace in Europe.

This, in a nutshell, is the framework and the foundation in which the EU has to operate, and it is not likely that this framework will change dramatically over the course of the next twenty years. Over the last two decades, security and defense have become areas of increasing effort within the EU. The EU has taken over responsibility for operations, as in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the *Operation Atalanta* to combat the threat of pirates off the coast of Africa. It has set up the EU Battle Groups as a system of quick response forces that are highly mobile and capable of coping with smaller operations. Taking the limited time frame into account, the achievements in this field are remarkable but, still, far from sufficient to match the threats of the future.

Now let us draw our attention from the current situation to the future and briefly look at the *Alternative Future Security Narratives* provided by the National Intelligence Council (figure 1). The EU certainly prefers a future security scenario located in the upper right quadrant, which means a cooperative concert of powers based on an effective multilateral system capable of dealing with emerging challenges and threats. And the EU wants to be a valued player in this system.

Figure 1: Alternative Future Security Narratives



Currently, the threats identified by the EU are, not surprisingly, the same as those the US has identified:

- Terrorism
- WMD
- Failing States
- International Crime
- Migration
- Energy Security
- Climate

But is this assessment still valid, and will it hold for the next fifteen to twenty years? To answer this question we need to look at the six dimensions that form the environment of strategic planning. These six dimensions, namely the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental dimensions, have to be understood as elements in a network with a high degree of interdependency.

The political dimension

The global political landscape will be characterized by a much higher degree of multi-polarity than we see currently. The problem seems to be that in an increasingly globalized and multi-polar world, the existing multilateral system and its main institution, the UN, can hardly manage the challenges and threats. While the United States will remain a global power, its position will be less dominant and increasingly challenged by other powers. Rising or reemerging states like Brazil, Russia, India, Turkey, and China need to take on more responsibility within this system, become more active, and invest more. Some of these nations will begin to lead globally, like China and Russia. Others will be mainly of more regional importance, like Turkey, which has already begun to increase its influence in the Middle East and will in all probability continue doing so. Globalization will continue and will create a more interdependent world where challenges and threats need to be addressed across borders. Globalization will continue to have winners and losers. And no country alone, not even the West alone, can address these challenges effectively. The West needs the rest, but in many fields it will also face a competitive relationship with these rising powers.

While the US and large parts of Asia and Latin America will remain zones of stability, the prospect for the Middle East and Africa as well as for some parts of Latin America are less promising. Developments in the Middle East and Africa, due to their geographical proximity, will often have direct implications for Europe. Thus, they will be of special interest for Europe. These regions might become or remain zones of instability and, at least for the foreseeable future, will be characterized by a high degree of uncertainty. The EU itself, despite several national differences and its current financial crisis, will remain a zone of stability and increasing integration, with the majority of member states facing no direct military or conventional threats on their borders.

The economic dimension

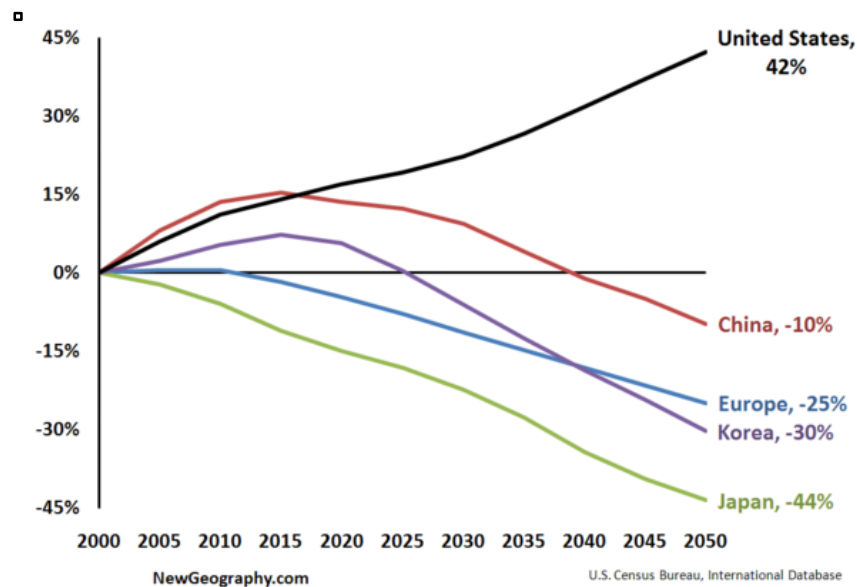
Globalization will remain the dominating factor in the global economic development. This globalization, however, will be characterized by increasing competition for markets, resources, and intellectual capital. The degree of interdependence of the global players will grow respectively, which

will, despite their rivalry and competition, prevent the outbreak of existential conflicts between the global players described above. States in the West, especially in the EU and the US, will be affected by severely limited budgets which will force these states to reconsider their current positions and policies. These budget constraints will also reduce the military capability gap between the West and new global powers over time.

The social dimension

The most influential development in the social dimension of the strategic environment will be determined by the changes in the demographics of Europe. With birth rates decreasing, Western societies will age and at the same time the composition and size of the European population and labor force (figure 2)—with regard to ethnicity, culture and religion—will change. This, in the short term, requires Europe to change its integration policies and, in the long term, to initiate a discourse within society to reverse some of the current trends. The homework many European countries have forgotten to do in the past will require some attention. These developments might lead to significant changes in the self-perception of Europeans and the definition of their identity with direct implications for foreign policy, including security and defense.

Figure 2: Labor Force Growth (ages 15-64)



The technological dimension

The technological developments we have faced over the last decades occurred with continuously increasing speed, and this tendency of ever shorter product life cycles will continue. This tendency of developments in the technological dimension will become one of the major challenges for security and defense. As described above, current decision making processes—especially in organizations like the EU—are not able, and have not been designed, to cope with such rapidly evolving developments.

Moreover, societies all over the world will increasingly be dependent on cyberspace. Cyberspace has started to revolutionize economies, information exchange, and education as well as science and has penetrated almost every sphere of life. Thus, threats will increasingly stem from cyberspace, and cyberspace will also, or actually has already, become a kind of “military platform” that enables leading military operations at all levels of command.

Another technological sector of increasing importance is the use of space-based assets. Communication assets especially are of critical importance for the developed world. Threats to these assets will be threats to the political and economic dimensions as well. European nations, through the European Space Agency (ESA, a non-EU organization), play a leading role in the use of space-based assets and, therefore, are also vulnerable to threats to these assets. This reliance on space-based assets will increase. The EU, together with ESA, has reacted and implemented a strategy for the future use of space. Security, however, still plays a subordinated role in the European considerations. For good reasons, the weaponization of space is strongly condemned by European nations. In addition, some European nations, namely France and Germany, have begun to build up their own space surveillance capability and will continue to Europeanize it.

The technological dimension, however, does not only have to be seen as a dimension of future vulnerability, but also as a dimension of new changes and opportunities to overcome shortfalls in current defense capabilities and to counter threats more effectively and efficiently. Increasing automation and use of robotics can be a way to overcome the shortage of available personnel for the military, to minimize the risk to the lives of soldiers, and to maximize efficiency. In the long run, technology gaps in the military capabilities of the leading nations will close, as stated above.

The legal dimension

New developments, especially in the technological dimension, will impose challenges to the legal dimension of the strategic environment. The increased threat of cyber warfare raises the question of accountability and, also, of an international legal architecture that ensures the enforcement of legal obligations. Arms control and reduction treatments—especially in the fields of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the military use of space, and also small arms in the developing world—need more attention. This includes regimes to observe the compliance with the respective treaties. Consequently, this raises the question of the role of international institutions, like the UN. This takes us back to the political dimension and clearly shows the interdependencies of developments in the different dimensions of the strategic environment.

The Environmental Dimension

The environmental dimension, finally, influences the development of new strategies mainly for two reasons: the competition for scarce resources and the risks stemming from climate change. Europe itself suffers from a lack of natural resources, which significantly weakens its position in the overall competition with the other global players, especially at times where human and intellectual capital will increasingly become scarce resources taking the demographic development into account.

Water scarcity and food shortages in Africa might have direct impacts on Europe, with a growing number of conflicts and increasing numbers of refugees both inside Africa, and between Africa and Europe. Most of these environmental challenges can't be dealt with nationally or regionally. They

require a global approach. Thus, besides their disastrous consequences, there might be a chance for increased global cooperation lying within these global challenges.

Implications for a future European security strategy

Based upon this analysis, we can draw conclusions and recommendations for a future European security strategy. The overall threat scenario, as described in the analysis, can be summarized as follows: A majority of states in Europe will not face conventional, military threats at its borders. Major future security threats will: occur in cyberspace; eventually arise from the proliferation of WMD; be directed against critical infrastructures, including space-based assets; result from the competition for resources as well as markets; and, finally, produce a potential influx of refugees from potential zones of instability. Terrorism will remain a continuous threat to western societies. The developments in the dimensions of the strategic environment will require Europe to accommodate the following considerations in its future security strategy:

- A new approach to homeland security, defense of territorial integrity, and expeditionary military operations. The fusion of internal and external security has become an accepted fact. The capabilities needed in the field of internal and external security, however, often differ. Moreover, not everybody has to deal with both of these aspects of security on their own. As stated above the majority of EU member states do not face direct conventional military threats to their territory. Thus, defense at the borders of the EU should become a European effort. This includes capabilities to counter the threat of ballistic missiles and threats to space-based assets. Taking the sophistication and costs of means to counter these threats into account, these capabilities should be called “European” capabilities, too. Moreover, cooperation with the US in this field might be of mutual interest and, at least for Europe, of high importance and a *conditio sine qua non*.
- The same applies to expeditionary military operations. This will enable the EU to build up sufficient capabilities while, at the same time, sharing the burden for these sophisticated—but expensive—capabilities. Taking the current conflict of national interests within the EU into account, this objective can’t be achieved in the short run. However, budget deficits in the US and the challenge imposed by rising powers to the US will require the Europeans to take care of themselves.
- Homeland security and defense, in contrast, should remain a national responsibility in a European network. Taking the nature of the most severe threats to homeland security into account, however, the role of the military should be reconsidered. Capabilities for countering such threats as cyber attack and terrorism do not necessarily have to be managed and provided by the military.
- This division between EU and national responsibilities, nevertheless, does not exclude EU-wide cooperation and coordination in the fields of national responsibility. On the contrary, it is the opposite that is required.
- There will be continued financial pressures on security and defense spending. Security spending will be favored over defense spending because it is more acceptable to the public.
- Taking demographic developments and budget constraints into account, European militaries in general will struggle in the competition with industry and other areas of the public sector for personnel. Thus, military capabilities will increasingly have to be based on automation and reliance on technology.

- Limited military capabilities on the national and European level will directly influence the future ability of the UN to mount UN-mandated military operations. That means, from a European perspective, that the UN's weak capacity to provide collective security by means of military force will remain. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because most of today's challenges and threats cannot be addressed by military force alone. Even if you happen to have a big hammer, not every problem is a nail.
- This understanding must lead to changes in the role played by force. Today and in the future, the use of force will be intimately interwoven with political developments applied against an obscure opponent under tight rules of engagement and closely monitored and scrutinized by the media and the public.
- That means operations will often be expeditionary, multinational, and multi-instrumental, and designed to achieve security and stability, and not necessarily military victory as traditionally understood.
- Information in this kind of operation will be key. Information can provide the opportunity for quicker decision-making but does not guarantee better decisions. The efficient utilization of technological as well as human assets is key to successful intelligence and will directly influence future military capabilities.
- Asymmetry will not only apply to tactics but also to aims and values.
- Military force will only be one of the instruments applied to achieve campaign goals. And again, when force is used it has to be proportionate, justifiable and legitimate.
- Nevertheless, Europe will remain very cautious about military intervention. Proportionality and political legitimacy, primarily in the form of extended multilateral endorsement, will be paramount. Europe will remain risk-averse.
- The focus of military efforts for Europe will shift to
 - Supporting diplomacy in preventing war
 - Discouraging parties who generate crisis
 - Supporting civilian crisis management instruments
 - Containing conflict
 - Providing territorial defense.
- The last point could be questioned, because the plausibility of interstate warfare between comparable opponents, in general, is reduced. Except perhaps for the US and to some degree for the EU, which have the most capable forces, most players would seek asymmetric strategies. And most effective in this area will be non-state players because they don't have another option and are not restrained by the law of armed conflict.
- In this scenario the technological revolution does not always play to the advantage of state actors. In a globalized world proliferation of technology is often beyond the control of governments. The sustained unilateral technological advantage of state actors over non-state actors cannot be taken for granted.

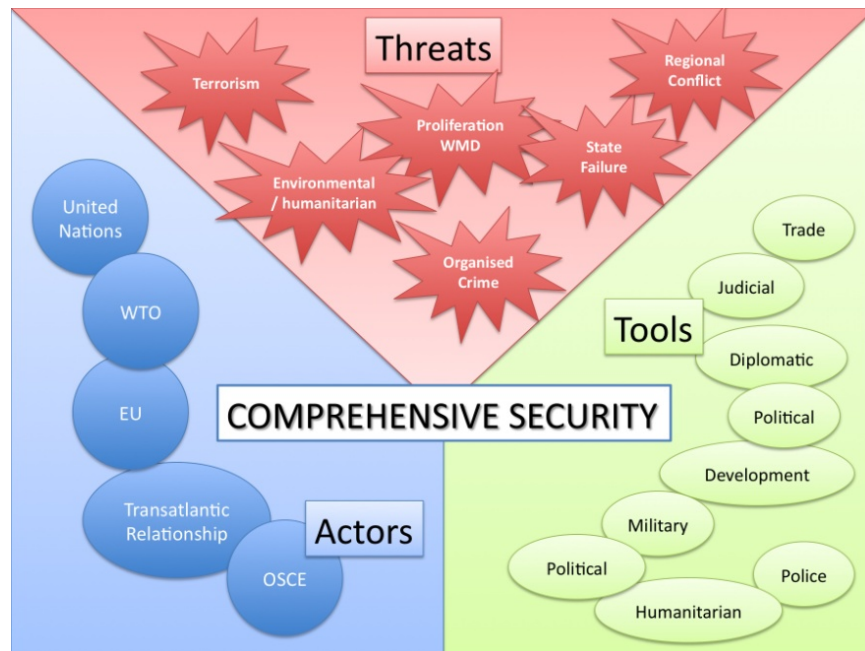
Conclusion

So, does Europe share the strategic assessment and vision provided by the National Intelligence Council? As we have demonstrated, Europe and the US have identified in principle the same threats and challenges to security. We agree that from the four Alternative Future Security Narratives, scenarios can be derived to analyze key security issues. The narratives are useful for framing thinking and debate. However, we all realize that these narratives will not be as pure in the real world as they might appear in the academic one. The real world security environment will present itself as a mixture of elements from all these narratives.

No matter to which quadrant the world order shifts—and this might be very hard to predict without a crystal ball—in none of the quadrants will the threats and challenges be military alone and they cannot be resolved by military force alone. Therefore, we feel that it is of utmost importance to have a variety of civilian and military instruments available, which can be tailored to address different security threats and challenges and which must be employed in an effective multilateral system.

This means that we should focus less on the symptoms and more on the root causes of threats. This in turn means that the focus of providing security has to shift from the military to civilian instruments, particularly in crisis prevention, crisis management and post-crisis reconstruction. That does not exclude the use of military force in certain scenarios to support civilian efforts or to show necessary resolve. Nevertheless, we always have to realize that the military can perhaps manage a crisis, but not solve it. What is needed is a comprehensive approach to security that provides multilateral institutions with a mix of instruments, including military force, that can be tailored to a specific threat or challenge (figure 3).

Figure 3: Comprehensive Security



Source: Schmid and Doering, 2008

Of course, this approach works best and is probably most effective in the concert of powers scenario, but it unlikely that there is a valid alternative to this approach if world order shifts to a less benign quadrant of the narratives.

For Europe the adoption of this approach is the only way to remain relevant as a security provider. In the changing strategic environment, Europe is on the edge of either remaining a global player or being increasingly marginalized. For the time being, its economic power will enable Europe to maintain global importance at least in the short to medium term. Taking the growing importance of other players on the one hand, and Europe's shortage of natural resources, budget deficits, and demographic decline on the other hand into account, the only option for Europe is further integration and a functioning multilateral system, both internally and externally. The alternative is an increasing marginalization of Europe and in the worst case a breakdown of the European multilateral system with probably devastating consequences.