

Does the European Union have a strategic culture?

Written by Angeliki Mitropoulou

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ANGELIKI MITROPOULOU, MAR 29 2011

Introduction

In order to present the various views regarding this subject, it is important to clarify what is meant by the term strategic culture. O. Meyer (2006) argues that, in general, there are many definitions of the term and that most of them are quite broad. The term was first included in a research report on Soviet and American nuclear strategies written in 1977 by Jack Snyder. He views strategic culture as the combination of ideas, emotional expressions and patterns of habitual behaviour shared by the members of a national strategic community, and which are relative to nuclear strategy. It can be found in a country's history, political culture and in the attitudes of the military leaders (Toje 2005, O. Meyer 2006). In other words, theoretically strategic culture can "provide a framework in which an actor approaches the questions of threat or use of force – and the broader question of hard power capabilities as policy resources" (Toje 2005, p. 122). O. Meyer (2006, p. 2) gives a more simple description of strategic culture: he considers it to be a "compass that helps countries chart their long-term path in security and defense policy, but also helps them to make choices at various junctures of uncertainty".

By reviewing the various definitions regarding strategic culture, one can notice that strategic culture has deep roots and a long-term horizon (Conskun 2007). It is an amalgam of features and can operate as a guide to decisions regarding the use of hard and soft power in foreign policy, and the use of nuclear weapons. It is not always easy to deduce the basic pillars of strategic cultures and norms just from the behavior and policies of national governments. They can also be found in speeches, statements and other documents combined with information extracted from opinion polls, newspaper articles, oral evidence and elite surveys. O. Meyer (2006) concludes that the most difficult feature of strategic culture is not to be found in its various definitions, but in its implementation.

Kerry Longhurst (O. Meyer 2006) believes that strategic cultures emerge gradually over time, through historical processes. As a consequence they are neither static nor permanent. In this context, we may therefore ask: Does the European Union have a strategic culture? And if not, can it create one for the future? It is true that when attempting to discuss such issues, one must always bear in mind that "it took Europeans more than a decade to digest the magnitude of the structural and ideological changes of the post-Cold War period" (Coskun 2007: 79). At this point, it is necessary to mention that O. Meyer (2006) underlines that a European strategic culture differs from a European Union strategic culture. Conskun (2007) cites Adrian Hyde-Price in order to underline the need to reconsider whether the strategic culture that was shaped during the 1950s is still suitable nowadays.

European Union Strategic Culture

It would be a mistake to assume that Europe can substitute the European Union and vice versa in discussions of international relations. Europe is mainly used as a geographical term that can include Russia and other areas of the former USSR. In this sense, before the end of the Cold War, a number of scholars argued that Europe could not help not having a strategic culture (Howorth and Keeler 2003). In its core, strategic culture has everything to do with security issues. On one hand, in the post-Cold War era, Europe is regarded as a peaceful zone; largely secure both from existential and direct threats to its territorial integrity and core values (Sens 2007). On the other hand, Europe is

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not entirely secure from threats such as illegal immigration and terrorism.

O. Meyer (2006, p. 27) argues that the European Union is a different political entity than any of its component parts. The European Union was established with its current name in 1993 with the Maastricht treaty and despite its relatively short history it has become a highly sophisticated political system. According to Sens (2007), the discussions regarding a European Union strategic culture were intensified at the beginning of the 21st Century, because transatlantic relations are even more problematic and dysfunctional, and the United States does not view Europe as its first security priority. Moreover, the collaboration between EU member-states regarding security issues has been ameliorated and deepened. Europe seems to be evolving to become an increasingly independent actor (Sens 2007, p. 2). Indeed, 9/11 had a significant impact on the European security environment. The 'War on Terror', proclaimed by Bush, dominated security discussions between North American and European capitals, resulting in changing threat perceptions. And this is not the sole strategic development which has had an impact on European Union policies; the relatively recent enlargement and the subsequent attempts at an institutional and constitutional reform along with the expansion of the use of advanced technologies of weapons of mass destruction are some additional strategic developments that have played a significant role.

In this context, a shared security strategy was approved by the leaders of the European Union on 8th December 2003. According to Javier Solana (2003) the aim of this task was to enable Europe to have a common and shared responsibility for global security and for building a better world. In May 2003, during the Informal General Affairs and External Relations Council in Greece, Mr. George Papandreou, who was then Foreign Minister of Greece, had underlined "an urgent need of a European strategic culture". The European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) was the formal admittance of the need to ameliorate the EU's military capabilities and, therefore, to create a strategic culture (Salmon and Shepherd 2003). The five fundamental threats for Europe included in the December 2003 European Security Strategy were terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure and consequent regional instability and, last but not least, organised crime. However, Cornish and Edwards (2001, p. 588) claimed that there had indeed been some kind of development towards a unified strategic culture in the EU, beginning in 1999 through a "socialization process".

So, is there any kind of evidence that European Union has a strategic culture after the proclamation that there was an urgent need for one? Many commentators focus on the capability of the European Union to act independently of NATO and especially on a military basis, because this could be a sign of an existence of a strategic culture apart from that of NATO. Cornish and Edwards (2001) argue that Operation Artemis, which took place in the autumn of 2003, was a demonstration of such a capability because it was a real-life example that Europeans could act cooperatively regarding the use of armed force. These scholars continue by saying that not only is there a strategic culture common to the European Union, but it is also in the process of evolving, as by definition it is not static. Moreover, they are of the opinion that while the strategic culture is progressing, it is becoming more and more distinct and detached from that of NATO.

Anderson (2007) argues that despite the attempts to form relevant policies and the arguments included in the "Solana doctrine", the European Union does not have an established security policy that includes a strategic culture. He goes beyond this point, claiming that the European Union does not possess such policies because it has very restricted executive powers regarding security and the potential improvement of these can trigger crucial and intense tensions among various European Union members, regardless of their sizes, and can cause severe frictions in the EU-US relationship. Moreover, this declaration cannot guarantee the enforcement of compliance of member-states.

He pinpoints that the European Union has not yet met two very significant conditions that would allow it to have a solid strategic culture, both in theory and in practice. The first one is the possession of a "grand narrative" about the content of security: who is to be secured, the ways that security will be achieved and the reasons for this. The second one is the competence for rapid decision-making and equally quick mobilisation of the relevant resources needed for its implementation (Anderson 2007; Rynning 2003).

Indeed, member-states still have independent security agendas, at least in specific areas of the world and regarding certain aspects. From available policy statements, it emerges that it is very difficult for the views of all governments of

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all EU members to be represented in a common and solid security framework (Gray 1999). Toje (2005) uses the term “heterogeneity” to describe this inability of the European Union to create a strategic culture that will be significant and convincing. One of the most important distinctions and contradictions of security cultures within the EU is the fact that some members of the EU belong to NATO, whereas some others do not. Another distinction is the existence of more than one predominant strategic culture of the old and new Europeans regarding transatlantic security (Coskun 2007).

An additional problem for the strategic development of the EU is the fierce opposition of the United States. The latter recognises the crucial geostrategic location of EU member-states, but this attitude could be justified according to some scholars. One of the basic arguments used to support this point of view is the long history of Europe and the stable nature of the European Union as an entity. Anderson (2007) cites Kalevi Holsti, who has raised the point that war-making and state-making capacities have been considered as a match in the past, and this is a reason why there is “a difficulty to imagine the European Union with a war-making capacity” (2007 ,p. 32). Anderson (2007) goes on by saying that the European Union has a lot more to do in order to increase its ability of being a worldwide, recognised military force. The most significant action taken towards this direction seems to be the Petersberg missions of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance.

O. Meyer (2006, p. 172) also pinpoints this argument and in addition concludes that the “existent strategic culture is relatively narrow and shallow, but this would support the role conception of a rather cautious Humanitarian Power Europe”. However, some support the opinion that the development of a strategic culture is not a matter of military capacity but of political will (Matlary 2006; Rynning 2003). In addition, the creation of a single military force of the European Union needs a very substantial defence budget. But, even after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, European governments were not willing to increase this necessary defence budget. In general, both Rynning (2003) and Toje (2005) strongly argue that one of the most prevailing views is EU’s disability of becoming a “liberal power”.

Conclusion

Few scholars have argued that European Union has left behind its “civilian power” identity by possessing a strategic culture. However, a much larger part of scholars have argued that the European Union does not currently have a strategic culture (Lindley-French 2002) but it is in a process of creating one and putting it into practice. They recognize that this is not an easy task. In fact, Toje (2005) reached the conclusion that this need to bring the EU security and defense policy into a practical level was one of the most important and demanding targets for the first EU security strategy. Matlary (2006, p. 119), more specifically, concluded that European Union has not a traditional strategic culture “that it is not risk-averse to using force precisely because the threats presented are existential.” A number of them argue that the European Union has the ability to create it (Matlary 2006) .Rynning (2003) believes that there are justified reasons to doubt the capacity of the European Union to become a strategic power and to distinguish among other traditional great powers.

If the position of numerous scholars that there is not currently an EU strategic culture is correct, does the EU have the potential to create one? Howorth (2002) underlined the fact that European Union will not be able to do without a strategic culture in the future. The real question is whether the European Union has the capacity to transition from a civilian to a strategic actor, and to develop a concrete strategic culture or, in other words, a higher level of autonomy for the EU regarding security and defence issues (Howorth and Keeler 2003).

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