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**THE EUROPEAN UNION, STRATEGIC DIPLOMACY AND THE BRIC  
COUNTRIES: THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE**

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# THE EUROPEAN UNION, STRATEGIC DIPLOMACY AND THE BRIC COUNTRIES: THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

Michael Smith

## Introduction

One of the key tests facing the emerging diplomatic system of the European Union is that of developing a strategic diplomacy. By this is meant a pattern of diplomacy that focuses on the pursuit of a strategic vision for the Union, and that provides principles and guidelines to shape the positioning of the EU both in the global arena more generally and in relation to key strategic partners. The EU has been a keen developer of strategic statements and strategic frameworks in relation to key partners and key regions or issues in the world arena – a tendency that can be traced back at least as far as the 1970s (Edwards and Regelsberger 1990, Alecu de Flers and Regelsberger 2005, Edwards 2011), and which reflects both the ‘internal’ desire to consolidate European diplomacy and the ‘external’ drive to contribute to world order. But from the outset, these efforts have been beset by tensions and apparent contradictions. As a result, it has been said on a number of occasions that the EU has many *strategies* but no real *strategy* (or ‘grand strategy’) for its international involvement, despite the elaboration of the 2003 European Security Strategy (Dannreuther and Peterson 2006, Biscop 2009, Biscop, Howorth and Geigerich 2009, Smith M.E. 2011). It has also been argued that the EU’s international strategies reflect nothing more than the desire for international stability and for the creation of an environment amenable to the pursuit of commercial advantage, or that they reflect the needs of the EU’s most influential Member States. This paper focuses on the issue of strategy through the particular lens of strategic

diplomacy, and is based on a chapter due to appear in a forthcoming edited volume (Smith, Keukeleire and Vanhoonacker 2015 forthcoming).

If we start from the assumption set out above – that strategic diplomacy is concerned with the generation and pursuit of a strategic vision, and with the provision of principles and guidelines to shape the positioning of the EU both in the global arena more generally and in relation to key strategic partners – then this suggests a number of requirements for the framing and pursuit of such a diplomacy: a stable institutional base, a means of extracting and coordinating the relevant resources both at the European level and from the Member States, a unified strategic narrative or vision, the capacity to adapt this narrative in the face of major international trends, and the capacity to both prioritise and target EU actions in a coordinated fashion on key relationships, partners or activities. If such qualities are present, it would suggest that the necessary components of deliberation, representation, communication and negotiation can be brought together to constitute an effective strategic diplomacy. But such aspirations are challenged especially in the current period by the proliferation of actors and issues in a globalising world

The contention of this paper is that despite the implicit and explicit claims made in relation to the post-Lisbon EU diplomatic system, the EU has not yet developed such a strategic diplomacy in a consistent or comprehensive form - indeed, in some ways it may be further from achieving this ambition than it was before the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. It does however possess the tools with which to construct a strategic diplomacy: there has been evidence that these might be used more effectively as experience in their deployment has accumulated, and it is possible to make a

number of recommendations about the ways in which those tools might be deployed in the next period. One key conclusion to the paper in this context is that the initial assumption that strategic diplomacy implies a hierarchy of aims, relationships and actions is challenged by the development of a more differentiated and networked process, through which a pragmatic adjustment to change by the EU is likely to be accomplished. Such a strategic framework is no less demanding than those traditionally attributed to states, but may be more attuned to the contemporary diplomatic *milieu*.

The paper proceeds by looking first in more detail at the nature and requirements of strategic diplomacy, and exploring the challenges facing the development of a strategic diplomacy by the EU. It then focuses on the challenge of change in the global arena, and on one of the key ways in which the EU has pursued its strategic objectives through diplomatic means – the growing array of ‘strategic partnerships’, particularly those with the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) group. As will be seen later, this group is in itself a moving and sometimes elusive target, indicative of the renewed fluidity of international dealings more generally in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and thus it poses a particular test of the EU’s capacity to address diplomatic challenges in a strategic manner. As such, it also focuses very precisely the relationship between the aspiration to strategic diplomatic action and the realities of a changing global arena, which is taken up in more detail in relation to the four BRIC countries in later chapters.

## **Towards a Strategic Diplomacy for the European Union?**

As noted above, there is a set of characteristics or key elements that must be provided in order for diplomacy to deserve the label 'strategic'. Here, I evaluate the extent to which the EU's emerging system of diplomacy can provide these elements, and the ways in which such diplomacy might in general be directed.

In the first place, strategic diplomacy requires a stable *institutional base*. The Lisbon Treaty sets out a new framework for EU diplomacy, centred on the interaction of several key institutions or services: the External Action Service (EEAS) led by the High Representative (also a Vice-President of the Commission) (HRVP), the President of the European Council (PEC), the Commission and the European Parliament (see Chapter 3 – for further discussion, see Joint Study 2010, Duke 2009, Vanhoonacker 2011, Vanhoonacker, Pomorska and Petrov 2012). This new framework has actually been the source of considerable flux and potential disruption in its first years of existence, since its construction and operationalisation entailed complex negotiations about financing and conditions of service, substantial transfers of personnel – especially from the Commission and the Council Secretariat – to the EEAS, the need to recruit significant numbers of diplomats from national services, and the challenge of establishing a new diplomatic culture in conditions where existing cultures and organisations need to be merged or re-engineered (Carta 2012, Smith M.E. 2013).

Not surprisingly, this process engendered significant uncertainties and often suspicions among those involved. Despite the consistent effort to create new working habits and mechanisms of coordination, there was a constant threat of

fragmentation, and of competition for ‘turf’ among both new and existing institutions. A sustained effort of ‘internal diplomacy’ was needed to keep the machine moving, and there remain areas of instability within the overall framework. The danger or the reality of fragmentation has proved especially challenging in the face of external turbulence such as that created by the ‘Arab Spring’ and conflicts within the EU’s southern and eastern ‘neighbourhoods’. The uncertainties often centred on the EEAS, since on the one hand it needed to create a ‘space’ for itself in the midst of competition and (sometimes) predation by other agencies and on the other hand it was seen by them either as ‘DG RELEX continued’ or as an essentially subservient arm of the President of the European Council (Hemra, Whitman and Raines 2011, Lehne 2011, Balfour, Bailes and Kenna 2012).

This uncertainty has clearly affected the capacity of the EEAS to contribute its full voice to the development of a strategic vision, and it is compounded by issues relating to *the capacity to extract resources* with which to support such a strategic vision. We have already noted the problems of coordination that became apparent within the first years of the new machine’s operation, and it is clear that these related in substantial degree to the perceptions that different groups had of the role to be played by the EEAS. Was it the potential leader of an integrated and strategic EU foreign policy, or was it no more and no less than a ‘service’, with the role of supporting other institutions (primarily the Commission and the Council/European Council) through analysis, briefing and the preparation of negotiations? (Hemra, Whitman and Raines 2011, Lehne 2011, Balfour, Bailes and Kenna 2012; see also chapter 3 of this volume).

The Treaty itself is not much help in deciding this question, since it implies a complex and issue-specific division of labour between the major institutions and agencies (Joint Study 2010, Vanhoonacker 2011). It is clear that the EEAS is the major repository of diplomatic expertise within the system, and thus that it claims the key human resources; but the development of 'foreign relations' groups within the Commission, both generally and by specific DGs, and the claim by the PEC to be the key external representative of the EU at the level of Heads of State or Government, are both important qualifications to this position (Interviews, Brussels, 2011). So is the brute fact that for many of the EU's external links, the key policy base is within the Commission, accompanied by much of the relevant expertise and by funding that sometimes dwarfs that available to the EEAS. A particular problem is posed by the persistent if muted contest for control of resources at the level of EU delegations in third countries, where the requirements of policies (for example development) still largely controlled by the Commission are at odds with the needs of effective diplomatic representation in specific areas (Smith M. 2013a). If the EEAS is to establish a firm identity as the 'foreign ministry' of the EU then the person delegated to be foreign minister (HRVP), in practice if not formally in name, needs to be able to extract the necessary resources. However the capacity to extract resources for the conduct of diplomacy is contested – and that reflects the position just in Brussels, without taking into consideration the diplomatic resources and efforts of EU Member States.

This latter factor is important not only in resource terms but also when it comes to the *development of a strategic narrative or vision* by the EU system. The Treaty seems clear that this is the responsibility of the PEC and the EEAS, directed by the

HRVP, working together – the PEC having the responsibility for representation and communication at the highest levels, and the EEAS the task of supporting this and then of implementing the relevant actions. There is an ambiguity here, in that the PEC seems to have the responsibility primarily for representation, whereas three other key facets of any diplomacy – deliberation and preparatory briefing, communication and negotiation – lie with the EEAS or (on ‘pillar one’ issues) with the Commission.

This uneasy division of labour means that the development of any EU strategic narrative is a complex exercise embodying both competition for ‘voice’ and the coordination of the ‘voices’ that are involved. Such problems are not unique to the EU, of course, but they take a particular form where the diplomatic machine itself is in the process of gestation and where the growth of an agreed division of labour is as much a political as it is an administrative process. There is also a potential for tension in the fact that the new diplomatic system calls for the addition of ‘politics’ and often ‘security’ to long-standing areas of EU external policy which have proceeded on the basis of technocracy or functional expertise, such as development policy or environmental policies; putting these elements together in a strategic narrative is likely to be costly both in terms of the coordination process and in terms of the resulting adjustment of standard operating procedures in (for example) the Commission.

As a result, and also as a reflection of the demands placed on various participants by the combined impact of the Arab Spring and the global financial crisis, there has been no significant development of an EU strategic narrative during the first years of

the system. At some stage, there will have to be an overt debate about this, however – as pointed out by some commentators as early as 2009 (Biscop, Howorth and Geigerich 2009, Biscop 2009). For example, the need to review the European Security Strategy in 2013 might have provided such an opportunity. But it is also the case that the ESS is no longer – if it ever was – the appropriate basis for development of a comprehensive narrative for the EU’s external relations (Biscop 2012). So there is a bigger and more challenging task to undertake, relating to *adaptation of existing strategies to changing demands*.

The problem of adaptation links strongly to issues of resourcing already discussed. The PEC has very limited resources with which to undertake such a review and adaptation, and thus it is inevitably led to call upon the EEAS for major inputs into the discussion. This was the case for example in September 2010 when the European Council, chaired by the PEC, directed the HRVP and the EEAS to “evaluate the prospects of relations with all strategic partners, setting out in particular EU interests and possible leverage to achieve them” (European Council 2010). Within the EEAS, the Strategic Planning Office was only fully established in September 2011, and it in turn has strictly limited resources with which to address the issues. Clearly, there is a major need for the kind of creative coordination that will take advantage of expertise in national diplomatic services, in the Commission and elsewhere to build a wide-ranging strategic vision. But this comes up against the plurality of ‘voices’ and the issues of competition already outlined in this paper. Since there is no realistic prospect of greatly increased resourcing for the EEAS in the next planning period, it is legitimate to wonder how much in the way of strategic thinking or strategic action will emerge over that period. The initiative to rethink summitry

and the EU's approach to strategic partners and their demands was interrupted by the crisis in the Eurozone but the HRVP's reports delivered in late 2010 and mid 2011 served mainly to illustrate the resource problems that she and the EEAS faced in trying to 'think strategically' (European External Action Service 2010).

The issues outlined above have been well recognised both within and outside the EEAS during the first five years of its existence. At the national level, for example, the UK House of Lords commented explicitly on the need for greater focus and prioritisation in EU diplomacy in its report of March 2013 (House of Lords 2013: 38-39). But the most explicit example of this kind of reflection was provided by the Action Service's own review of the first three years of its operations (European External Action Service 2013). In specific relation to strategic thinking and strategic action, the Review took a clear stance. After enumerating the ways in which the Service could provide input to strategic analysis and evaluation, but also the difficulties of coordinating between many interested bodies, it noted:

The EEAS is uniquely well placed in the EU institutional framework to promote the strategic direction of the EU's external action, in particular with the active involvement of Member States and close co-operation with the Commission as well as the continued support of the European Parliament. With this in mind the EEAS policy planning capability should be reinforced. Beyond this, there is clearly scope for the EEAS to use its unique position in the EU institutional framework to promote the strategic direction of the EU's external action, in particular with the active involvement of Member States and close co-operation with the Commission as well as the continued support of the European Parliament. The role of the High Representative in presenting the position of the Foreign Affairs Council in meetings of the European Council is important in this respect. The High Representative, as Vice President of the Commission could contribute external relations priorities for inclusion in the Commission work programme. Similarly, the EEAS should continue to contribute to the broader work programme of the trio of rotating Presidencies.

More generally, it could be useful to reflect on a new basis for EU strategies or policies to be adopted jointly by Member States, the EEAS and the

Commission (e.g. making the linkages between joint papers from the High Representative and the Commission with Council conclusions).

This, of course, is a largely institutional and procedural approach to the issue of developing strategic diplomacy, and as such it reflects the preoccupations and tensions of the first three years of the EEAS' existence. But one of the most obvious features of the broader environment within which the EEAS has emerged is that it does not provide the time or space for institutional reflection. The environment is turbulent, and it imposes constant and severe demands on the capacity of the EU to respond strategically to a number of important global trends. One of the key trends in this context is the continuing restructuring of the global arena, and specifically the role of 'rising powers' such as the BRIC group.

### **The challenge of change**

I have pointed out elsewhere (Smith M. 2013b; see also Hocking and Smith 2015 forthcoming) that the EU is confronted by a complex challenge of change in the global arena. Partly, this reflects the shifting overall power structure and the opportunities or constraints it has thrown up in terms of international stability and security. Partly also, it reflects long-term changes in the global political economy, which have posed new challenges for the EU in areas where it has been active and engaged for a very long time: multilateral negotiations, the diplomacy of international trade and issues of global governance. As a result, the EU has been faced with a system in flux, in which its position as a participant and its capacity to generate stable roles and expectations has come under pressure.

As already noted, one of the key areas in which the EU's role and status has been challenged is in the Union's relations with 'rising powers'. The EU has faced challenges from emerging powers before – from Japan and then Korea and the 'Asian tigers' in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, but the challenge in the twenty-first century has been more pervasive and multi-dimensional. Not only are the rising powers the largest producers of key products and the largest consumers of key resources, but they also constitute a challenge in terms of their approaches to international security, to global governance and to the key norms of international conduct (Smith M. 2013b: 660-64).

This means that there is a consequent challenge to the EU diplomatic system demanding a comprehensive diplomatic response – essentially, the elaboration and pursuit of a strategic diplomacy for the early twenty-first century. In developing such a response, a number of potential directions are possible: the building of new multilateral frameworks, the development of regional partnerships, the construction of new bilateral mechanisms to manage relations with key partners. It is also possible to conceive of several different aims for such new departures: these might be summed up as partnership, containment and management, embodying different assumptions about the nature of the challenges faced and the instruments available to the Union (Smith M. 2014 forthcoming). One of the key mechanisms for the handling of bilateral relations has been the development and formalisation of 'strategic partnerships', and the following section explores these in more detail.

## **The EU's strategic partners and strategic relationships**

One potential pay-off from an effective strategic diplomacy is in the capacity it creates for management of key partners and relationships within a framework that indicates priorities and preferences. It is not likely to be a revolution in strategic thinking within the EU's system of diplomacy – and as already noted there are very good reasons not to expect it, and to be cautious about any attempt to set an EU strategic vision in concrete at this time especially – then this is likely to affect the EU's approach to its key *strategic partners and strategic relationships*.

The EU has over the past twenty years set a lot of store by the designation of 'strategic partners' and the identification of key requirements for their management. Thus for example there are four designated 'strategic partners' in the Americas alone, among them the most important of all, the USA. But simply to state this indicates one of the problems that has emerged with the concept of 'strategic partnerships': they are not all created equal and they certainly have not converged on a single template or set of essential elements for their construction and maintenance (Gratius 2011: 2). The concept has been stretched, in some cases almost beyond recognition, and this was recognised by the PEC when he asked the EEAS to conduct its review of the partnerships and subsequently organised the special European Council meeting referred to above. In broad terms, each element of the concept of 'strategic partnership' can be questioned, as can the EU's capacity to pursue a range of such partnerships effectively, especially in the aftermath of the global financial crisis and in the context of turbulence in key regions (Renard 2011, Grevi and Renard 2012a).

One of the results of the strategic partnership review during 2010-2011 was – perhaps inevitably – a recognition that differentiation, prioritisation and a focus on issues as well as on partners is an appropriate way forward. In this context, a baseline definition of ‘strategic partners’ would be those countries with which regular summits at Head of State/Government level are held, and thus with which the PEC has a continuing relationship. With these countries or groupings, the issue for the EU is that of focusing and prioritising the relations embodied in the summit, and also of maintaining what might be described as the ‘infrastructure’ of the partnerships. This ‘infrastructure’ varies substantially in depth and scope between key partners, but it is rightly the preserve either of the EEAS or of the Commission, depending on the nature of the dialogues and negotiations that are taking place at any given point, rather than of the PEC. Such a definition and division of labour does not presume that there should be any form of overarching and comprehensive agreement that embodies the partnership; rather, it expresses an evolutionary and dynamic understanding of diplomatic priorities.

If we accept that this is the baseline from which the EU can work on its range of strategic partnerships, and that this is the emerging pattern, then it becomes possible to envisage other elements of what might more realistically be seen as a strategic framework for managing relationships or issues. Key partners are to be dealt with at different levels and often in relation to specific policy areas where they are particularly engaged or significant. Thus it might be possible to develop an approach to the three ‘traditional’ or cold war strategic partners (the US, Japan and Canada) whose long established relationships with the EU would also benefit from a strategic reconsideration to take account of changing economic and political

circumstances. But even here, the differences between the United States – often cited as the EU’s only ‘real’ strategic partner – and the others, where much of the focus falls upon trade and commercial activities, would have to be recognised. It is also clear that specific issues will often entail the construction of appropriate coalitions or networks of partners who can be involved in the defence or the promotion of EU positions (or who might be used as sounding boards on which to test the practicality of EU positions). In this process, it seems inevitable that EU Member States will, also be engaged, given their own existing and often long-standing strategic relationships with a very wide range of partners. Here the role of the EEAS as a ‘diplomatic entrepreneur’ might be seen as a key part of the development of a diplomatic strategy (as opposed to a more centralised strategic diplomacy) (Hemra, Whitman and Raynes 2011).

As already noted, one of the key elements in this rather pragmatic version of strategic diplomacy is the summit process. Summits can be characterised as strategic occasions, since they bring together the key elements of diplomacy – deliberation and preparation, representation, communication and negotiation – in specific combinations and at specific times. They also throw into sharp relief the division of labour entailed in the practice – as opposed to the theory – of strategic diplomacy in the EU context. Whilst the EEAS is heavily involved in the preparation phase, often with important inputs from the Commission, the primary representation role in the context of summits lies with the PEC, whose *cabinet* is also the key focus for the conduct of the summit process. The PEC is also responsible for communication – getting the EU’s message across, often in conjunction with the President of the Commission (who inevitably will represent many of the key concrete

policy concerns entailed in a given relationship). The EEAS has a major responsibility for the execution of commitments undertaken at the summit, including implementation of agreements and the negotiation of agreements that are set in train at such meetings, but here they have to share responsibility with the Commission, especially on 'pillar one' issues. This means that the 'day-to-day' process of conducting strategic partnerships often lies heavily with the EEAS and the Commission, whereas the setting of strategic directions engages both of these bodies in a series of interactions with the PEC. Over the first four years of the EEAS' existence, there has been a shift towards recognition of this division of labour, and towards a coordinated approach to the summit process.

Two important possibilities emerge from this discussion of strategic partnerships, strategic relationships and the summit process. The first is that a *de facto* strategic diplomacy is emerging or will emerge from the need to service, to conduct and to follow through on summits. This is rather different from the notion of strategic diplomacy as the setting of an explicit and comprehensive framework which then serves as the point of orientation for all subsequent diplomatic activities. Rather, it goes with the grain of what is already there, and takes the EU's emerging diplomatic system as the means by which the conduct of summits in its broadest sense can be enhanced. The jury is obviously out on the extent to which this version of strategic diplomacy has come into existence, but it provides us with one intriguing way of following the development of the EU's diplomacy more generally, within a framework of understanding about the requirements of strategic diplomacy.

The second possibility to emerge is that strategic partnerships will increasingly be differentiated in terms of their sectoral focus, and that it is therefore important to understand the ways in which particular sectors attract strategic behaviour and strategic commitments on the part of the EU in relation to specific partners or groups of partners. In this context, it is fruitful to look, as Giovanni Grevi, Thomas Renard and their colleagues have, at sectors such as environmental regulation, non-proliferation, terrorism and global financial management (Renard 2013, 2014, Grevi and Renard 2012a, 2012b), where the roster of partners is variable and where the range of interests engaged is strongly differentiated. By implication, the diplomacy demanded by the construction of such sectoral partnerships must also be differentiated and based upon the generation of knowledge and expertise within the EU's system of diplomacy as well as the search for effective coalitions in a world of 'bi-multilateralism'. This again is a step away from the monolithic image of strategic partnerships that is sometimes discernible in the pronouncements of EU officials.

### **Testing the EU's Strategic Diplomacy: the BRICs (and beyond?)**

The BRICs ( Brazil, Russia, China and India) were first understood as an academic concept (O'Neill 2001) designed to incorporate for analytical purposes the four so-called rising powers in the contemporary international system. However, despite now self identifying and meeting as a group at annual summits since 2009, the BRICs have not really developed a significant collective identity - nor has the EU been able to develop a coherent strategy towards them even though all four have been identified as strategic partners (Keukeleire and Bruyninxck 2011, Cameron 2011, Hooijmaijers 2011, Gross 2013). The EU also has already established strategic partnerships with three of its cold war allies (the US, Japan and Canada)

and with three additional 'rising powers' (South Korea, Mexico and South Africa). Furthermore the EU has also to consider how best it will relate in future to another group of (lesser?) rising powers which include Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria and Ukraine as well as a number of regional organizations (Missiroli and O'Sullivan 2013). To complicate matters, South Africa has recently been formally admitted by the BRICs to their grouping but this seems destined to make it less rather than more likely that they will develop a collective coherence that will require the EU's strategic consideration (Gross 2013). In fact, in the new BRICS grouping the EU is faced with three genuine rising powers (Brazil, India and South Africa) - but unlike both China and Russia, who share Great Power pretensions (rising in the case of the former and arguably declining in the case of the latter), these three are perhaps better categorised at present as Regional rather than Great Powers. To complicate matters still further, in the context of the EU's interest in the European security order, Russia might also be categorised as a Regional Power along with Turkey – an issue that has become especially salient in the context of crisis in the Ukraine and Syria.

In this context of diversity and differentiation, it has been difficult to establish the central goals of EU strategy. At one level, the strategy is to have 'strategic partners' and this could be seen as an end in itself, embodying the desire by the EU to become a central part of the global diplomatic landscape. It is clear, though, that other elements come into play. There is certainly a desire to establish stable relationships on a long-term basis, most often as the foundation for economic cooperation with key emerging powers. At the same time, there is a desire to engage those powers with central parts of the broader multilateral framework such as the

World Trade Organisation (WTO), and by this means to both discipline them and provide a robust framework for the handling of the inevitable disputes; this in turn links with a desire to contain the economic and to a certain extent the security threats envisaged as emerging from the rising powers more broadly. Alongside the aims of partnership and containment, there is also a more mundane but arguable vital aim – to manage the relationships and to extract the maximum benefit from them for the EU and its Member States. In relation to the BRIC countries, it is far from clear that these elements have been integrated into a clear EU strategy that manages to differentiate between partners and between the central priorities of EU diplomacy (Smith 2013b).

Thus, if we look broadly at the way that the EU has been able to develop its strategic partnerships with the original BRICs it is clear that the record is mixed at best. There has been a series of summits with lengthy agendas that are often dominated either by short term crises or by inconsequential detail, and a lack of real progress on ambitious long-term action plans or the formalisation of partnership and cooperation agreements. At the same time, summits are often dominated by the trade issues that are at the heart of relations with India and China (and which are insulated to a degree from the more political agenda), whilst there is a tendency on the part of the major EU member states to pursue bilateral initiatives that undermine EU unity. The BRICs themselves demonstrate a relative lack of interest in anything other than a trade relationship with the EU and an irritation, expressed by them all at one time or another, that the EU is mainly interested in committing them to a positive participation in the established frameworks of global governance without at the same

time being prepared to consider the reform of those frameworks so that they more effectively embrace the BRICs' interests.

It could be deduced therefore that it would make sense for the EU to focus less on seeking a collective multilateral framework focused on the BRICs (what might be described as a *milieu* goal, dedicated to the strengthening of the multilateral system) and focus instead on the more selfish goals of *self extension* based on its own particular interests (Wolfers 1962). If specifically identifying and looking after its own interests rather than trying to create a more perfect world became the focus of EU strategic thinking then it might make sense – as noted above - to extend the list of strategic partners and to seek specific objectives, either with individual partners or with groups of partners selected for their ability to contribute on specific EU policy targets. To stick with the current list of ten strategic partners might confirm the BRIC countries' belief that the EU's primary strategic objective is to get them to join an extended version of the old Western club system of multilateral global governance – in other words, a policy of containment rather than partnership. Not only would this continue to be unattractive to the BRICs but it is not clear that this ambition is shared by the EU's more traditional strategic partners such as the United States, Japan and Canada.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has set out to provide an overview of the requirements of effective strategic diplomacy, and to explore these in the context of the EU's internal development as well as its external engagement. There is no doubt that the first four years of the post-Lisbon arrangements have provided a number of important

challenges and provoked a number of questions about the EU's capacity to elaborate and implement strategic diplomatic action. Some of these challenges have arisen from within the Union, whilst others have reflected the patterns of change and challenge within the broader global arena. The process of adjustment to the post-Lisbon setting and to a changing global arena has produced what might seem to be a pragmatic rather than a visionary approach to strategic diplomacy, and it seems likely that this will remain the pattern for the forthcoming period, despite the major leadership changes that will take place in the EU during 2014. This conclusion clearly raises important questions about the relationship between hierarchical and networked processes of diplomacy, and also about the ways in which the EU's diplomatic role may evolve in the next period of its development.

In this context, it is possible to identify a number of additional adjustments that might make the course of strategic diplomacy smoother for the next period. First, the EU needs to expand its list of strategic partners further to include other emerging or rising powers and also needs to identify and prioritise specific interests that it will seek to pursue with selected strategic partners. The all-encompassing agendas that have tended to characterize both action plans and summits are a recipe for long term disappointment. Second, the EU may wish to reconsider the relationship between its bilateral strategic partnerships and its multilateral strategic partnerships and it may wish also to reconsider its relationship with the three 'traditional' partners (the US, Japan and Canada). In keeping with the conclusion outlined above about the pragmatic and differentiated nature of the EU's strategic diplomacy, the aim should be to identify and pursue the EU's key interests in a world with multiple stake-holders and a range of major cross-cutting issues.

Third, the essential role of the EEAS in maintaining the infrastructure' of strategic partnerships with the BRICs and others needs to be recognised both by the Commission and by the PEC. In other words, the 'day-to-day' and the more long-term elements of strategic diplomacy should be brought into a creative balance. In this context, so that the PEC can play an even more effective role in the development of the EU's strategic relationships. S/he needs to recognise the essential supportive role that should be played by the EEAS; in turn, the HRVP, ideally assisted by Deputies, should be encouraged to make greater use of the opportunities afforded by their role as VP of the European Commission to enhance the more effective coordination of the EU's many external policy positions. The PEC should utilise their accumulated experience of establishing personal relationships with the leaders of the EU's strategic partners to encourage the members of the European Council to work together to pursue the EU's collective external interests rather than risk undermining the EU's ability to exploit strategic partnerships by the pursuit of uncoordinated bilateral initiatives with the EU's strategic partners.

Fourth, the special role that both trade and development policy matters play and will continue to play in many of the EU's strategic relationships needs to be recognised, but ways need to be found to ensure that they are better integrated into the EU's overall evaluation of its relations with strategic partners. The negotiating experience of those in the Commission responsible for trade and development in particular needs to be better integrated with the work of the EEAS, and the EEAS needs to play a proactive role in assisting other areas of the European Commission to develop a general awareness of how their policy areas might best be fitted into an

overall EU strategy. There is a need for a greater awareness in the Commission of the external impacts of internal EU policies. Equally, in considering how diplomatic strategies might be devised in the future the EEAS and the Commission in particular should give due consideration to the (post Lisbon) changed role of the European Parliament in the framing and execution of EU external relations. The positions taken by the European Parliament can be seen as presenting both threats and opportunities to those who would seek to develop EU external strategies, and to the EU's strategic partners themselves.

Fifth, the EU should consider building a new approach to strategic diplomacy around the preparations for, the conduct of and follow up on bilateral summits. This would make it possible to focus on specific issues with specific partners, but it would represent a clear move away from an approach to strategic diplomacy that essentially assumes that all conceivable issues are always on the agenda for all strategic partnerships. There has already been a significant move in this direction, but inevitably there is a 'Christmas tree' effect surrounding the agenda for any given summit meeting with a major strategic partner.

Finally, if anything is to be learned from the EU's experience of attempting to work with the BRICs, then it is that they all seek fundamental reforms of the current systems of global governance. The EU is not going to be an attractive strategic partner for them either collectively or (as they would probably prefer given that they are as much each other's rivals as they are partners) individually, if it is not prepared to consider seriously issues such as the reform of the UN, the WTO, the IMF and other global institutions. For the EU to respond effectively to these sort of

demands requires a degree of internal EU unity that currently seems hard to achieve - another reason for the EU to consider building strategic partnerships around its own material goals rather than its ambitions to engage its strategic partners in the establishment of a new world order. As a corollary of this recognition, the EU should consider developing a set of strategies towards the many rising powers in the contemporary system that recognises the stubborn persistence of 'Westphalian' politics. Whilst the EU may briefly at the turn of this century have aspired to take the lead in establishing 'post-modern' global structures that mirrored its own evolution, the reality now is that those who they need to develop strategic partnerships with remain stubbornly 'modern' and focused on sovereignty and status in a changing world.

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