Empowering paradise?

The ESDP at ten

ANAND MENON

European integration has proved to be the enemy of European military power and, indeed, of an important European global role.


The European Union is a global actor, ready to share in the responsibility for global security.


At their Cologne summit of June 1999, the 15 EU heads of state and government approved the launch of what they called at the time the ‘Common European Policy on Security and Defence’.¹ Ten years on, the EU is engaged in 13 military and civilian missions across three continents, and what subsequently came to be labelled the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has established itself as a key element of the Union’s external policies.

In the process the ESDP has, as illustrated by the statements reproduced at the head of this article, become the subject of heated debate. Assessments have varied widely between those ‘hailing a superpower in the making’ and others ‘lambasting the inherent futility of the EU’s efforts’.² While critics such as Robert Kagan have argued that the ESDP is misguided and threatens to undermine, rather than reinforce, Europe’s ability to play a meaningful global military role, others, leery of the lure of such a role, have warned that it threatens to undermine the Union’s unique ability to wield non-military forms of influence.³ Others still have hailed the ‘unprecedented political project’,⁴ the ‘military revolution’,⁵ as a result

of which the Union has placed itself ‘squarely on the road towards autonomy in matters of defense’.6

This article attempts to assess the impact of the ESDP. It argues that the speed at which it has developed, and the number of operations undertaken under its aegis, have been impressive. The new-found ability of the EU to intervene using military tools represents an important and useful addition to the West’s security policy armoury, particularly in those instances where other multilateral organizations are unwilling or unable to do so. Yet there remain grounds for concern. Some of these relate to the apparently modest ambitions that operations to date suggest the member states have set themselves; others to the feebleness of steps taken to improve European military capabilities, which belies ambitious rhetorical claims regarding the Union’s global role. There are also disturbing indications that the ESDP, while enhancing the ability and willingness of some member states to participate in crisis management activities, has come to serve as an alibi for a tendency to avoid broader international security responsibilities.

In what follows, the emphasis is placed firmly on what the ESDP has meant in terms of the ability of member states to deploy military force. Relatively little attention is paid to the numerous other elements of the Union’s security policy or to the institutional framework developed to support the ESDP. This is not to imply that these are either unimportant or uninteresting. The Union is unique among international organizations in its capacity to contribute to all three aspects of post-conflict stabilization: security (military and policing), economic and humanitarian, and political and institutional. Moreover, institutional questions, such as the level of coordination between different EU institutions, or of cooperation between the Union and NATO, shape the ability of the EU to act effectively. Yet initial expectations were focused on the ESDP as a military undertaking, and it is its military dimension that has sparked the most heated debates in both academic and policy circles. Furthermore, there is a tendency in much of the academic literature to focus excessively on the institutional development of the ESDP at the expense of studies of its practical impact (a tendency arguably prevalent in the study of European integration as a whole). Ultimately, what the EU does is more important than the mechanisms by which it does it, and a disproportionate focus on the latter can serve simply as a distraction from the more practically important question.

The discussion is divided into three parts. After an initial examination of the ESDP’s record, the second section of the article assesses it as an international institution, considering the ways in which it has both constrained and enhanced the ability and willingness of member states to deploy military force. A final section considers its implications in terms of the contribution of member states to international security more generally.

Empowering paradise?

The record to date

Operations

Since the inception of the ESDP the Union has launched a total of 22 operations, 13 of which are still under way. The range of these latter underlines the global nature of EU interventions, from Somalia (operation Atalanta is the most recent ESDP mission, launched in December 2008), Guinea-Bissau, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, two missions) and Chad to Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina (two missions). Afghanistan, Georgia and the Palestinian territories (a further two missions). As to the nine missions successfully completed, three were in the DRC, the other six in Sudan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM, three missions), Georgia and the Indonesian province of Aceh. Operations have ranged in size from the modest (the 15 personnel assigned to the security sector reform mission in Guinea-Bissau) to Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which at its peak involved 7,000 troops (reduced, in February 2007, to 2,500 backed up by an ‘over the horizon’ reserve).

Strikingly, given both the fears and hopes expressed at its launch about the predominantly military nature of the ESDP, only six operations have been military (Concordia in FYROM, Artemis and EUFOR in the DRC, Althea in Bosnia, EUFOR in Tchad/RCA, and Somalia). Seven have been police missions (in Bosnia, FYROM, two in the DRC, Palestine, Macedonia and Afghanistan), and in addition the Union has carried out four border missions, one planning mission, three rule-of-law missions, three monitoring missions, two assistance missions and two security sector reform missions.

Of all policy sectors, external policies are perhaps uniquely difficult to assess. Some have judged the ESDP in purely quantitative terms, comparing the EU’s activism favourably with the single mission launched by NATO this century—and drawing the conclusion that the former is now more ‘usable’ than the latter. Yet any fair assessment of the operations undertaken to date must go beyond a simple numerical tally. Clearly, an in-depth assessment of the various missions is beyond the scope of a short article such as this (and in the case of many of them would be premature); nevertheless, some tentative conclusions can be drawn.

Overall, EU interventions seem to have had a positive impact. Observers have applauded the outcomes of the various deployments in FYROM, and EU and NATO interventions in Macedonia quite possibly helped avert civil conflict. The peace brokered in Aceh has held, and an Oxfam report has acknowledged that EUFOR Chad ‘has made many civilians feel safer through its activities, which

7 At the time of writing, further missions in Gaza are under active consideration.
8 The other mission still under way, EUJUST LEX, has involved the training of Iraqis in Brussels.
10 For those concerned with the maths, some missions have been of a dual nature and hence are counted twice.
include patrolling known dangerous routes, destroying unexploded ordnance, making contact with local leaders, and positioning itself defensively around civilians during rebel and government fighting.14

Yet there remain grounds for scepticism, particularly regarding what appears to be the limited nature of the ESDP. Military missions in particular have been somewhat unambitious in scope. The first ESDP military deployment—Operation Concordia in FYROM—involved only 400 personnel; other Balkan deployments were notable for the relatively benign theatres into which they were deployed.15 Indeed, it is striking that a significant proportion of the Union’s military interventions have either followed, or accompanied, action on the ground by other institutions (NATO troops preceded those of the EU in both Macedonia and Bosnia, while the Union operated alongside UN forces in Congo).

One consequence of the limited scale of the missions undertaken has been their inability fully to resolve problems on the ground. Thus, a UN report noted that EU intervention addressed ‘only the consequence and not the issues underlying the conflict in Chad’.16 Operation Artemis, deployed to the DRC in 2003, was the object of much hostile comment from humanitarian groups for being ‘totally insufficient’ to meet the challenges there, because of its restricted scope in terms of both space and time.17 Médecins Sans Frontières bemoaned the fact that European forces managed to guarantee civilian safety only in very limited areas.18 African specialists similarly criticized the Union’s security sector reform mission in the DRC because of its small size and limited budget.19 Finally, the DRC operation of 2006 failed to solve the fundamental problems on the ground, and in fact withdrew while tensions were still high.20 Even civilian operations—supposedly the Union’s forte—have not necessarily fared better: the International Crisis Group (ICG) was highly critical of the EU’s police training mission in Bosnia, pointing out that crime rates increased after its deployment and that EU officials failed to act on information about war criminals, interpreting their mandate as narrowly as possible.21

Clearly, one must be careful not to take such negative assessments too far. The ESDP is still a relatively new undertaking, and it is conceivable that the Union will become bolder as it gains in experience and self-confidence. Nor should one underestimate the particular difficulties and dangers inherent in some deployments—notably that in Chad. Moreover, the Union has often undertaken missions that

others, such as the United States, have not been willing to countenance; and if its ambitions have been limited, they have generally been achieved. Intervention in such cases has been preferable to no intervention at all. Finally, for all the criticisms of the limited scope of missions, this has itself proved useful in terms of persuading member states to act at all. The fact that European interventions are increasingly carried out under an ESDP rather than a UN flag has proved to be something of a reassurance for member states concerned about the open-ended nature of UN operations that are frequently susceptible to ‘mission creep’.22

Criticism of the ‘lack of ambition’ displayed by member states characterized as ‘risk averse’ has been most acerbic when levelled at those instances when the Union has declined to intervene at all.23 During both the Darfur crisis of 2004 and the outbreak of violence in the DRC in the second half of 2008, possible EU deployments were discussed and eventually rejected.

The ESDP had in fact been declared operational one month prior to the outbreak of violence in Darfur. The incipient crisis in that benighted region was, moreover, seen by several observers as representing an ideal opportunity for EU intervention. As one Commission official commented: ‘It would be a humanitarian intervention dispensing effective multilateralism in a failed state for altruistic purposes. The rewards in terms of alleviating human suffering would probably be high—and the likely costs in terms of blood and treasure would be low. Frankly, it’s difficult to imagine a more suitable mission for the EU.’24

Others have argued that the EU possessed the necessary military means for an intervention and that the ‘rag-tag guerillas’ responsible for widespread massacres ‘almost certainly would have proven no match for professional soldiers’.25 That these soldiers were never deployed, so the argument goes, was down to a lack of political will rather than of capabilities.26 Such criticisms, while superficially compelling, are not wholly fair. The Union was anxious (all the more so in the context of what had happened in Iraq) to act on the basis of a UN Security Council resolution. Yet the text eventually agreed on in August 2005 made any deployment conditional on the agreement of the Sudanese government—which was not forthcoming.

If the absence of UN authorization accounted for hesitations in the face of the slaughter in Darfur, this was not the case when fighting erupted in the DRC in late 2008. In December, the UN Secretary-General himself appealed directly to the Union for an intervention force. Moreover, by this time, not only had member states amassed considerable experience of military interventions in sub-Saharan Africa, they had also developed capabilities designed specifically to facilitate such interventions. The much-heralded EU battlegroups were inspired in large part

by the experience of Operation Artemis in the DRC,\textsuperscript{27} conceived of as units of between 1,500 and 2,200 troops, deployable—often in a ‘bridging’ function while larger military units were assembled—within five to ten days and able to operate autonomously for at least 30.\textsuperscript{28} When the UN Secretary-General made his request for an EU bridging mission of limited duration (four months) to supplement the existing UN operation in the DRC until reinforcements arrived, the occasion seemed tailor-made for the deployment of military formations designed, in the words of the British defence minister Geoff Hoon, as:

specifically, but not exclusively, to be used in response to a request from the United Nations to undertake rapid intervention in a hostile environment. This might include acting to prevent atrocities or helping with the provision of urgent humanitarian aid. This type of scenario is particularly applicable in failing or failed states. Recent examples in Africa … have not only illustrated the need for such a capability, but demonstrated how a relatively small number of forces can have a significant effect in a short period of time, provided they can be deployed rapidly with the appropriate support.\textsuperscript{29}

In December 2008, the Union’s foreign policy chief Javier Solana presented member states with four military options. They prevaricated, with some taking advantage of the fact that the Secretary-General had requested a force slightly larger than a battlegroup to question the possibility of deployment, while others insisted that there was no need for a separate EU force alongside the UN operation on the ground.\textsuperscript{30} Ultimately, no consensus could be reached.

Any appraisal of the ESDP, then, must take account not only of the impact of those missions that have been undertaken but also of those instances where the Union has failed to intervene at all. Satisfaction with the early progress of the ESDP must be tempered by a realization of its limits.

Capabilities

The ESDP was, from the first, seen by some not only as a policy in its own right but equally, if not primarily, as a tool for enhancing member states’ military capabilities. In London in particular, the ESDP was heralded as a potential ‘capability driver’,\textsuperscript{31} designed as much to restore the credibility of NATO in the face of growing American disaffection with European weakness as to empower the Union itself.\textsuperscript{32} In consequence, it has spawned a bewildering variety of capability initiatives. These have ranged from the Helsinki Headline Goal of December 1999


\textsuperscript{28} Jacoby and Jones, ‘The EU battle groups in Sweden and the Czech Republic’, pp. 317–18.


\textsuperscript{30} Author’s interviews with senior national and EU officials, London and Brussels, Dec. 2008.


\textsuperscript{32} Howorth, \textit{Security and defence policy in the European Union}, p. 53.
Empowering paradise?

(ENVISING AN APPROXIMATE FORCE CATALOGUE OF 60,000 TROOPS, 100 SHIPS AND 400 AIRCRAFT DEPLOYABLE WITHIN 60 DAYS AND SUSTAINABLE FOR ONE YEAR) TO ANNUAL CAPABILITIES PLEDGING CONFERENCES AND THE NOVEMBER 2001 CAPABILITIES IMPROVEMENT CONFERENCE—WHICH ITSELF LED TO THE CREATION OF THE EUROPEAN CAPABILITIES ACTION PLAN OF DECEMBER 2001, DRAWN UP TO DEAL WITH NUMEROUS SHORTFALLS VERSUS THE ORIGINAL HELSINKI TARGETS. IN DECEMBER 2003 MEMBER STATES CREATED THE SO-CALLED CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT MECHANISM. THE FOLLOWING JUNE SAW THE UNVEILING OF A BRAND NEW CAPABILITIES PLAN IN THE FORM OF THE HEADLINE GOAL 2010, AND THE VERY NEXT MONTH THE MEMBER STATES CREATED THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY (EDA) TO ASSIST THEM IN MEETING THEIR OBJECTIVE OF CAPABILITIES IMPROVEMENTS. TWO YEARS LATER, 2006 WITNESSED THE DRAFTING OF A ‘LONG-TERM VISION’ FOR CAPABILITY NEEDS.33

These many and varied initiatives have generated some—albeit low-key—progress. EU requirements have helped drive forward national defence reform processes and the development of new capabilities.34 Meanwhile, most European states are taking steps to enhance their force-projection capabilities.35 The ESDP has also played a part in shifting the attitude of some member states towards participation in military operations—Ireland being one notable example and Germany another (it is too often forgotten how far Germany has come since the 1990s in terms of its willingness to deploy combat troops abroad).

Yet it is hard to avoid the conclusion that feverish attempts to devise capabilities improvement schemes have failed to deliver much practical progress. In a coruscating critique, the former head of the EDA baldly characterized as a ‘failure’ attempts to enhance European capabilities.36 A recent report comments that ‘institutional initiatives have generated flurries of bureaucratic activity, but achieved limited results’.37 Not only have the member states serially failed to meet the various targets that they have set themselves, they have also downgraded those ambitions. Thus, many have seen the 2010 Headline Goal as a less ambitious replacement for the original document produced in Helsinki five years earlier, with the battlegroup idea representing a ‘sexy sop’ to those frustrated with the inadequate progress made.38 As the former EDA chief has put it, between Helsinki and the Headline Goal 2010 ‘the goalposts were not so much moved as dismantled altogether’.39

Capability shortfalls have had a direct impact upon operational effectiveness. A shortage of trainers has plagued the EU police mission in Afghanistan: while the US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, had spoken of a need for some 3,500, by

33 Simultaneously, a parallel process was under way on the civilian side. The Helsinki summit produced a Civilian Crisis Management Action Plan; the June 2000 Feira Council adopted four priority areas as the basis of civilian crisis management. In May 2002 a Rule of Law Commitment Conference was held in Brussels at which member states committed officials for crisis management operations. In November 2004 a Civilian Capabilities Commitment Conference was held, and the following month the civilian Headline Goal 2008 was drawn up. In November 2005 the member states held a Civilian Capabilities Improvement Conference.

34 Witney, Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy, p. 17.


36 Witney, Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy.

37 IISS, European military capabilities, p. 29.


39 Witney, Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy.
December 2007 the Union had provided only half of the 195 trainers it had itself pledged, moving Gates to comment that the ‘European effort on the police training has been, to be diplomatic … disappointing’. The EU deployment to Chad had to be delayed by six months because of a failure to locate 16 helicopters and 10 transport aircraft. Indeed, capability improvement initiatives can themselves have paradoxical results for operational capacity. Thus, during discussions over the EU deployment to Chad in 2008, the ability of Sweden to deploy troops was limited by the need to maintain the Nordic battlegroup—to which Sweden is the major contributor—on standby.

Perhaps most strikingly and most significantly, chronic shortages of airlift capacity continue to bedevil operational capacity. The French commander of Operation Artemis, General Bruno Neveux, declared in September 2003 that the mission had confirmed the need to invest in strategic transport. As a stop-gap solution, several member states have resorted to hiring transport aircraft—either renting Ukrainian Antonovs or attempting to persuade the US Military Air Transport Service to provide C-17s. Meanwhile the long-term solution to such shortfalls—the Airbus A400M—has been the victim of repeated and prolonged delays, with the first deliveries now not expected until 2012 at the earliest.

Three major problems confront the member states in terms of capabilities. First, most European states are simply not spending enough on defence. SIPRI reported that in 2005 Europe was the only region in the world where military spending decreased—by some 1.7 per cent. Defence spending by European NATO members fell by 35 per cent between 1985 and 1995. The disparities between member states, moreover, are huge: France and the UK make up 45 per cent of total EU defence spending; they, along with Cyprus, Bulgaria and Greece, are the only member states to spend over the 2 per cent of GDP that NATO has deemed to be the minimum requirement.

Not only are funds scarce, the cash is often badly spent. Despite the Cold War having ended almost two decades ago, European armed forces still own 10,000 main battle tanks and 2,500 combat aircraft. And despite large manpower budgets (the 27 member states had almost 2 million active service personnel on their books in 2006), only 30 per cent of these forces can actually operate outside European territory because of either legal restrictions or inadequate training. Paradoxically, a gradual move to rectify this situation via the professionalization of national

41 Jacoby and Jones, ‘The EU battle groups in Sweden and the Czech Republic’, p. 328.
44 Giegerich and Wallace, ‘Not such a soft power’, p. 175.
47 IISS, European military capabilities, p. 94.
48 Witney, Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy.
49 IISS, European military capabilities, p. 6.
50 Witney, Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy.
Empowering paradise?

armed forces has proved hugely expensive, with the switch to all-volunteer forces serving to increase the proportion of defence spending taken up by personnel costs.51

Finally, inefficiencies result from the fragmentation of the European defence market. Several small national defence industries producing similar hardware for several small national militaries is a recipe for duplication and waste. Again, there has been no shortage of both declaratory and practical initiatives aimed at remedying this situation. In his speech at the Le Bourget Air Show in 2007, France’s President Sarkozy attacked the waste inherent in a system where each country demanded ‘juste retour’, arguing that the ‘future is in joint programmes’.52 In January 2009 the European Parliament approved a draft directive intended to limit the ability of governments to protect their domestic defence procurement markets from foreign competition.

Initiatives, however, do not necessarily produce results. The same President Sarkozy made his first trip within France to the European Aeronautic Defence and Space (EADS) facility in Toulouse, while his defence minister stressed the fact that a core objective of the government was to ‘preserve our national defence industry’ so that France could enjoy ‘the necessary degree of autonomy’.53 And while a principle of juste retour may be inefficient, it has haunted attempts to restructure EADS, with each participating state attempting to maintain its share of activities, including production facilities, which continue to be shared between France and Germany.54

Political will

The possession of the requisite military hardware is, of course, only part of the picture. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) has argued that the political will and ability to utilize these resources also represents a crucial component of capabilities.55 Some member states are more willing than others to countenance the use of force and to sacrifice their own blood and treasure in doing so.

The short history of the EU battlegroups provides an interesting case study of the interplay between material resources, political will and the operational effectiveness of the ESDP. The battlegroups have been deployed since January 2007, when they were declared to have reached ‘full operational capacity’. Two are on standby at all times, according to a predefined timetable scheduling the order of six-monthly standby rotations.

Yet for all the expectations that the battlegroups would enhance capabilities for military intervention, none has, as yet, been deployed. In 2006 Germany declined to send its newly constituted battlegroup to the DRC, citing concerns over being

51 IISS, European military capabilities, p. 95.
53 Hervé Morin, ‘Université de la défense à Toulouse, discours de M. Hervé Morin, Ministre de la Défense’ (Toulouse, 2007).
55 IISS, European military capabilities.
the lead nation despite its lack of experience of high-risk deployments.\textsuperscript{56} Similarly, as fighting in the DRC intensified during the second half of 2008, those member states whose battlegroups were scheduled to be on standby (Germany and the UK) turned out to be among the most vocal opponents of intervention.

This reticence had contrasting causes. Senior EU officials commented wryly that the British battlegroup was on standby in name only. The troops were in fact resting between deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, which explains the reluctance to deploy on the part of a government rhetorically committed to humanitarian intervention.\textsuperscript{57} In the German case, by contrast, opposition to intervention stemmed from a reluctance to send troops to Africa, based not least on a growing suspicion that German troops were being used as ‘cover’ by certain partners to legitimize intervention in their former colonies (see below).\textsuperscript{58}

Other member states, by contrast, are less wary about battlegroup deployment. Thus Sweden has made the creation of its battlegroup a centrepiece of recent defence reforms.\textsuperscript{59} The IISS estimates the strength of the Nordic battlegroup on standby during the first half of 2008 at 2,850.\textsuperscript{60} Officials have argued that, had this battlegroup been on standby in the second half of 2008, EU intervention in the DRC would have been considerably more likely, not least as both British and German governments would have been far less vocal in their opposition.\textsuperscript{61}

**The uses and abuses of international institutions**

The preceding overview provides a mixed picture. In attempting to assess the Union’s new policy instrument, however, it is important to be clear about what kind of beast the EU is and what it would be fair to expect of any defence policy it might wield. The Union is not a nation-state, and it is only by assessing it as a particular form of cooperation between nation-states that its achievements, limits and potential can be appreciated.

**The ESDP as international institution: the limits of the possible**

The limited nature of the ESDP is partly a function of the institutional structures that define it. Member states have proved reluctant to pool sovereignty in defence in the way they have in many other areas of public policy, preferring to devise a system in which decisions are taken on the basis of consensus. This consensus system differs fundamentally from that of NATO, where the United States provides effective leadership of a kind that even the larger EU member states have failed to secure for themselves. Certainly, the notion of ‘framework nation’ encapsulates the way one of the ‘big three’ has generally played a lead role in running opera-

\textsuperscript{56} Jacoby and Jones, ‘The EU battle groups in Sweden and the Czech Republic’, p. 332.
\textsuperscript{57} Interviews, Brussels, Dec. 2008.
\textsuperscript{58} Interviews, Brussels, Dec. 2008.
\textsuperscript{59} Jacoby and Jones, ‘The EU battle groups in Sweden and the Czech Republic’, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{60} Witney, Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy, pp. 124–5.
\textsuperscript{61} Interviews, Brussels, Dec. 2008.
Empowering paradise?

tions, with the operational headquarters formally being given planning authority by the Council. Other member states (notably Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden) have, however, stubbornly resisted attempts to institutionalize any kind of ‘leadership group’ when it comes to politico-strategic decisions. Indeed, the introduction of the battle groups, in which all member states have pledged to participate, may affect their willingness to tolerate even such ‘operational’ leadership as has been the norm to date.62

Structure is, of course, only part of the story. The other factor that conspires with the need for consensus to shape the decisions made are the deep divisions between member states over numerous aspects of the ESDP. For all the voluminous academic literature claiming the emergence of a European security culture or the gradual convergence of views initiated by the socialization of ambassadors in the Political and Security Committee (PSC), member states remain stubbornly differentiated in terms of their approaches to security. In attitudes towards the use of force, the projection of power, the legitimacy of intervention in former colonies and the correct balance to be struck between hard and soft forms of power, significant differences remain between their competing views as to what the ESDP should be.

The combination of dissension and a requirement for consensus has profoundly shaped the workings of the ESDP. The need to convince often reluctant partners militates against the rapid deployment of coercive power.63 The EU is thus structurally better suited to smaller-scale crisis management than to larger military interventions. It is also ill-equipped for long-term strategic thinking. Divisions between member states were a fundamental reason for the ‘studied ambiguity [of the Helsinki Headline Goal] as to its ultimate size and purpose’.64 Vague capabilities goals are hardly a recipe for effective capabilities improvements.

Similarly, the somewhat ad hoc way in which the Union decides on missions also reflects the problems inherent in reaching agreement. This is clear when one considers the reaction to individual crises. Disagreements between member states effectively scuppered EU intervention in the DRC in 2008. The need for prolonged negotiations taking into account the sensitivities of the German Bundestag both shaped and delayed by several months the operation carried out in Kinshasa in 2006. The unanimity requirement also helps explain the apparent lack of ambition of the ESDP, in that the ‘lower the level of commitment, the higher the likelihood of achieving consensus’.65

While the problems inherent in securing agreement between member states are indicative of ‘coordination games’, those faced in attempting to enforce decisions are ‘collaboration’ problems stemming from the lack of independent, centralized enforcement mechanisms.66 Here, comparison with other aspects of EU activities

64 Howorth, ‘Defence and European integration’, p. 71.
66 Wolfgang Wagner, ‘Why the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy will remain intergovernmental:}
is instructive. Within the first pillar, the supranational institutions are responsible for ensuring that states act on their commitments; and those institutions enjoy at least a notional ability to impose sanctions, ranging from shaming to the imposition of fines on member states that fail to abide by their declaratory commitments.67

The design of the ESDP has clearly been modelled in some respects on other aspects of the EU system. The inspiration behind the headline goals, for instance, lay in the convergence criteria for economic and monetary union.68 Observers similarly refer to the EDA—in language redolent of that used for the European Commission—as a putative capabilities ‘conscience’ of the EU.69 Such analogical reasoning, however, fails to take account of the very different institutions involved in each sector. While the Commission and the individual commissioners who make up the college enjoy formal autonomy from the member states, the executive body of the EDA, the Steering Board is made up of the defence ministers of the 26 participating states (Denmark does not participate). The agency thus finds itself unable to carry out the most basic tasks associated with independent institutions—lacking, for instance, the ability even to provide accurate data on contributions to ESDP missions.70 It is hardly surprising, then, that it has failed to get member states to live up to their oft-repeated pledges on capabilities and resources. Indeed, having set up a relatively toothless institution, the member states, just to be on the safe side—and this is indicative of the jealousy with which they insist on control over their own security policies—sidestepped it and undertook to devote 2 per cent of defence spending to research funding ‘on a voluntary basis’.71

Perhaps the clearest example of the problems inherent in a system of decentralized interstate cooperation are the arrangements in place for financing military operations. The financial cost of military interventions is an increasingly salient issue in many capitals, with, for instance, the Czech defence ministry beginning to think of foreign deployments as simply too expensive and too great a drain on the defence budget.72

Early EU operations such as the Aceh mission—financed initially on the personal credit cards of its personnel, supplemented by a loan from the entertainment allowance of the British ambassador in Jakarta73—illustrated all too clearly the need for some kind of formalized system. That finally adopted, in February 2004,
Empowering paradise?

is mixed. The dominant principle is that costs ‘lie where they fall’, according to which participating states pick up the tab for operations. This is supplemented by the so-called Athena mechanism under which states contribute to ‘common costs’ according to a GNI-based index.74

Estimates suggest that ‘common costs’ have covered some 10 per cent of overall mission costs.75 Their precise definition, however, varies, as member states decide on a case-by-case basis what is covered (generally, common costs have been taken to mean those for HQs and infrastructure). Clearly, the GNI-based formula suits some member states more than others. The operation in Chad, for instance, cost Germany some €24 million under the Athena arrangements, the total cost being €500 million, of which €100 million were in common.76

The trade-off here is between decentralization and common funding. The former effectively penalizes those states contributing to a mission: having invested in the necessary capabilities in the first place, they then have to carry the costs of deploying them.77 The principle that costs should lie where they fall therefore provides incentives for non-participation in operations. Joint financing, on the other hand, creates incentives for non-participating states to block missions through fear of having to share the cost of operations in which they have no interest. Several PSC ambassadors from member states generally less supportive of external military interventions have also argued that a system of full common costs might encourage some of their partners to be excessively interventionist.78

The ambassador of a member state that publicly favoured intervention in the DRC in 2008 argued that it is precisely because of common costs that some states argued against such an intervention.79

French concerns about costs were particularly acute during the Congo crisis because battlegroups are governed by a formula involving a higher proportion of common costs than under the Athena mechanism. The definition of common costs for battlegroup deployments includes transport costs, which have never as yet been considered as common under Athena.80 These can be significant: the cost to the UK Exchequer of leasing four C-17s from Boeing has been put at $200,000 per aircraft,81 while that of a single Antonov flight to Afghanistan as part of ISAF is around $250,000.82 Senior officials argued to the author that German reluctance to approve the deployment of a battlegroup to Chad was based in no small part on considerations of cost.83

74 This can be found as the annex to Council of the European Union, ‘EU Council factsheet: financing of ESDP operations’ (Brussels, June 2007).
76 Interviews, Brussels, 2008.
80 European Council, ‘EU Council factsheet: financing of ESDP operations’.
81 Lindstrom, Enter the EU battlegroups.
82 Jacoby and Jones, ‘The EU battle groups in Sweden and the Czech Republic’, n. 80.
Legitimizing and laundering

Part of the intrinsic value of the ESDP lies in its ability to carry out operations for which other institutions, even if interested, might not be considered legitimate. Thus, both the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement insisted that the Union was the only international organization that could intervene in the Aceh conflict.84 Similarly, NATO could not have intervened in the 2008 Georgian crisis in the (albeit limited) way the Union did because of Russian suspicions of the organization.

The Union also on occasion provides political cover for member states, allowing them to act collectively where this might be problematic individually. Through this process of ‘laundering’, the EU whole emerges as greater than the sum of its parts and provides value added in terms of the capacities of member states to intervene in international security affairs. This is particularly true in dealings with the developing world, where, though individual member states may carry considerable historical baggage, ‘collectively, they represent more of a new beginning, and their claim to neutrality carries more weight’.86 Or, as one more sceptical and strident observer has put it, member states can hide their own policies behind the EU, with ‘bloodied hands discreetly held behind backs’.87

On the other hand, there is sometimes a fine line between ‘laundering’ and the related yet far less salutary notion of ‘dirty laundering’ whereby states attempt to hide behaviour in defence of narrow national interests behind an institutional cover.88 Concerns that France has attempted to do just this have haunted debates about EU interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. Operation Artemis, for which France supplied 1,785 of the 2,200 troops deployed, was seen by some as ‘more a French operation with an EU cover, than an EU operation led by the French’.89 Numerous critics pointed out the problems inherent in the Chad intervention. The Brussels correspondent of the Financial Times, Tony Barber, commented on his blog that some of France’s partners were beginning to see it as ‘a prop for French foreign policy in a former African colony … For the life of them, the Germans fail to see how it can be in their national interest to jump into this maelstrom’.90

Concerns about the neutrality of the Union have affected the willingness of third states, particularly in the developing world, to support EU interventions.91 They have also shaped the attitude of certain member states towards such missions. During discussions of the deployment to the DRC in 2006, German officials voiced

---

84 Howorth, Security and defence policy in the European Union, p. 213.
Empowering paradise?

their fear of being ‘instrumentalized’ by their French and Belgian colleagues, with some expressing the sentiment that the former colonial powers should deal with the issue themselves. Increasing resentment of such perceived ‘instrumentalization’ also played a part in provoking German hostility towards the idea of an EU intervention in Chad in 2008. The short-term gains implied for interventionist states in acquiring EU ‘cover’ for their actions might thus soon be outweighed by the growing reluctance of their partners to sanction such interventions.

Ends and means: the ESDP as ‘project’

Apart from shaping the actions of member states in various ways, institutions often take on a life of their own. In the case of the EU, there are many for whom European integration is not simply a functional response to collective action problems but rather a ‘project’ in its own right. Accordingly, the development of common policy instruments at the EU level reflects not only issue-specific pressures but also a belief that ‘more Europe’ per se is something to be welcomed.

Thus, ideas for institutional engineering are sometimes dominated as much by attitudes towards integration as by military capabilities. Those member states most anxious to press ahead with the ESDP are not always those best equipped to do so. The so-called ‘Chocolate summit’ of April 2003, with its ambitious calls for a European Security Defence Union, involved, alongside France, a member state at best hesitant about many ESDP interventions—Germany—and two of the lower spenders on defence as a proportion of GDP, Belgium (1.14 per cent) and Luxembourg (0.67 per cent). When, in early 2008, Pierre Lellouche, French UMP deputy and spokesman on defence policy, published proposals for the creation of a defence ‘G6’ to take the lead in cooperation on defence matters, he suggested that the group should comprise France, the UK, Germany, Spain, Italy and Poland. He thus excluded not only two of the member states most active when it comes to force deployments (the Netherlands and Sweden) but also several with a track record of deploying an above average number of troops (notably Austria, Finland and Ireland). There tends to be, in other words, something of a ‘disconnect between public commitments to European military integration … and practical deployments of forces’. Yet ideological commitment to European integration is of little use when it comes to running operations, and potentially counterproductive in terms of providing incentives to member states to enhance their capabilities.

Perhaps fortunately, schemes such as the defence G6 are at present in abeyance, given the state of suspended animation in which the Lisbon Treaty finds itself.

93 Interviews, Brussels, Dec. 2008. Suspicions are not limited to member states. Several members of the Political and Security Committee intimated to the author that they are less than happy about the active role played by the Belgian Commissioner for Development, Louis Michel, with some commenting that his own personal interests in several African states hardly make him the most impartial of representatives on that continent.
95 Witney, Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy.
96 IISS, European military capabilities, pp. 13, 16.
97 Giegerich and Wallace, ‘Not such a soft power’, p. 164.
Yet the ideology of integration has also had more serious consequences. Thus, a desire to prove the effectiveness of the EU has sometimes helped determine the missions it has undertaken. The Serbia project director of the ICG commented that anxiety to illustrate the effectiveness of the ESDP meant the Bosnian police-training mission was not sufficiently well thought through.98 Others suspected that Artemis was born out of a desire to prove the ESDP operational rather than any considerations related to African security.99 Similarly, had the Union been as interested in enhancing security in the DRC in 2006 as it was in ‘proving to the world that the EU is capable of speaking and acting’, its troops would have remained on the ground into 2007.100

Not only does a desire to show that the ESDP works potentially detract from a focus on its impact, it can also influence discussions about the most effective forms of international intervention. Member states sometimes appear more interested in asserting European leadership than in ensuring effective collaboration with existing multilateral missions run by other institutions.101 And this is despite the fact that, in some instances, the most effective way for Europeans to deploy outside Europe would be to provide forces directly to UN missions rather than acting through the ESDP.102

An obsession with ‘building Europe’ has also impinged on the way Europeans have assessed the effectiveness of the ESDP. Perhaps most striking is a tendency to assess it in procedural terms. When, in the autumn of 2001, a spokesman proudly declared the ESDP operational, he was forced to admit, to howls of laughter from the assembled press corps, that this merely meant that the requisite committee system had been put in place. One academic observer defines effectiveness in terms of ‘the EU’s capacity to produce collective decisions rather than the EU’s impact on events’.103 And while it was certainly no mean feat rapidly to deploy 200 EU monitors to Georgia in 2008, the fact that many have chosen to view this as a success bears eloquent testimony to a temptation to judge process (the fact that a force was deployed) rather than outcome (the military invasion and subsequent—and lasting—partition of a European state).104 Similar lines of argument have characterized European assessments of the role of the so-called EU3 in dealing with Iran, with the emphasis being placed on the success of the Union in maintaining unity rather than the continued tendency of the Iranians to enrich uranium. Little wonder, then, that some are moved to comment on ‘the

103 Wagner, ‘Why the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy will remain intergovernmental’, p. 577.
104 ‘The European Union has not only found common ground on how to react to the Georgia crisis, but has translated that common approach into effective action’. Nick Witney, ‘Georgian lessons for EU generals’, E/Sharp, 2008, p. 17.
obsessive preoccupation of west Europeans with the nature of the mechanism they are creating rather than the environment in which it resides’. Such a self-congratulatory approach to assessment can hamper the ability of the Union to draw accurate conclusions from its operations and learn from its mistakes hence a tendency to focus on the successful deployment to Chad rather than on the fact that the refugee crisis with which the mission was intended to deal had been created by a conflict in Darfur in which the Union had not intervened. It also informed the optimistic declaration of the December 2008 report on the implementation of the EU’s Security Strategy that the EDA had successfully led the creation of a ‘competitive and robust defence industry across Europe’.

Security beyond the ESDP?

While the development of the ESDP has been impressive in many respects, to focus on it alone is to misunderstand and underestimate the myriad other ways in which EU member states contribute to the maintenance of international security. These member states are contributing almost 26,000 troops to the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan (of a total of 55,100, around 23,000 of whom are American). European states likewise provide around half the 15,000 troops deployed under the UNIFIL II mission in Lebanon, significantly more than deployed in the largest ESDP military mission to date (Althea in Bosnia) and a far more significant undertaking than the 30 police officers manning the Rafah border crossing (though attention in Brussels seems far more focused on the latter). Between 1995 and 2008, significant numbers of European troops were deployed with the UN forces in Croatia and Lebanon; with NATO in Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; and unilaterally in Sierra Leone (UK) and Côte d’Ivoire (France). While missing various deadlines in terms of capability within the EU itself, European governments have deployed significant numbers of forces abroad into conflict areas: the number of European troops deployed on operations rose between 1995 and 2007 from 39,000 to over 71,000.

A focus on the ESDP can serve to divert attention from the true nature of the European role in international security. More perniciously, a narrow preoccupation with building an EU intervention capacity can allow member states the luxury not only of focusing on structures and processes but also of using the difficulties inherent in securing consensus within the Union as an excuse for relative strategic inaction.

Even in those cases where the EU has acted, its interventions have been on the margins of international politics, studiously avoiding interactions with the major

---

107 Giegerich and Wallace, ‘Not such a soft power’.
powers. One Commission official, in making the case for intervention in Darfur in 2004, pointed out that ‘here we have a low technology, low intensity conflict taking place in a region where we would not trespass on the interest spheres of Russia or the US’.109 Others have argued that Africa has been the location of so many EU military missions precisely because of the possibility of deploying ‘without trespassing on the interest spheres of more powerful actors’.110 Meanwhile, and for all the missions it has carried out, the Union has been a mere observer of recent major international crises in the Middle East, the Gulf and the Caucasus.111

This is not a criticism of the ESDP per se. The institutional constraints discussed above mean that there are necessarily limits to what it can achieve. The point is that, given these constraints, if Europeans really aspire to play a leading role in international security, they must deploy the full panoply of instruments available to them, including NATO and the UN. A narrow focus on the ESDP would be simply insufficient. There is certainly a role here for the ESDP, albeit for that element which, to date, has registered the least significant progress. If Europeans are to make the contribution to international security to which their rhetoric aspires, far more progress must be made in enhancing military capabilities. Failing this, they will continue to depend on others, as occurred in September 2008 when Moscow announced that it would provide helicopters for the EU mission in Chad, while the member states were confronted with the extent of their impotence in the face of the Russian invasion of Georgia.

Conclusions

The development of the ESDP has been significant and remarkably rapid. The number, scope and range of missions carried out have been far in excess of what most would have expected back in 1999. And it is undeniable that the majority of these interventions have had a beneficial—if limited—impact. The sheer number of requests coming in for the deployment of EU missions bears eloquent testimony to this impact.

All of this is particularly impressive given the institutional constraints under which the ESDP operates. Defence is not like other policy sectors. Because of its political sensitivity, governments will not entrust responsibility for either making or implementing decisions to others. It is frankly remarkable that 27 disparate member states have managed to achieve consensus as often as they have. In this sense, the ESDP has achieved far more than Kagan and other sceptical observers predicted (or, in some cases, would admit); the European ‘paradise’ has taken some, albeit halting, steps towards acquiring military power. Yet, equally, the ESDP will be perennially contingent, depending as it does on interstate consensus and on the willingness of sufficient of these states to commit forces to operations.

111 Predictably, little mention is made in Brussels of the obvious failure of the EUSR Border Support Team (not an ESDP mission) deployed to Georgia in September 2005, one of whose tasks was to ‘facilitate confidence-building between Georgia and the Russian Federation’. Council Joint Action 2006/121/CFSP, 20 Feb. 2006, appointing the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus.
Empowering paradise?

Conversely, it is, for the same reason, hardly surprising that the Union has failed to develop the ‘strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention’ called for in its own Security Strategy.\(^{112}\) Interventions have been limited in time and space. Difficult interventions have been avoided. The most impressive examples of EU power have taken place in its near abroad, where it enjoys the particular advantage of the fact that the societies with which it is dealing aspire to membership.\(^{113}\)

The ESDP may even serve to promote European insularity and strategic myopia. It has contributed to the development of a culture in which high-flown rhetoric serves as an alternative to action. Chris Patten pointed out that the Union issued 19 statements on Darfur, expressing its concern some 53 times, while failing to intervene.\(^{114}\) Similarly, ambitious declarations about capabilities have led to little in the way of improvements, with, in the words of one knowledgeable observer, analysis and cataloguing acting as ‘an alibi for avoiding tough decisions’.\(^{115}\) Germany, despite the myriad policy and financial doubts of the Berlin government about military deployments, was at one point scheduled to participate in eight different battlegroups.\(^{116}\) The ESDP thus allows member states the opportunity to talk a good game while failing to deliver on their pledges.

Hedley Bull had few doubts regarding the unacceptability of European dependence on others in security matters, asserting baldly that a ‘state of dependence on others … ought not to be compatible with the dignity of nations with the wealth, skills and historical position of those of Western Europe’.\(^{117}\) While dignity may seem a somewhat outmoded notion in the international relations of the early twenty-first century, a lack of European capabilities implies an inability to give help to those most in need of it: ‘Choosing operations that require relatively little force and risk, or where the professional military component is minimized, means ignoring some of the literal and metaphorical cries for help that ought to mean most for a European sense of values: cases of manifest genocide, as in Darfur, or, indeed, violent abuses of human rights and human security.’\(^{118}\) Having publicly recognized that sovereign governments ‘hold a shared responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity’,\(^{119}\) such an inability is hardly acceptable, particularly given the proliferation of ambitious rhetorical claims concerning the EU’s role as a positive force in world politics.

---


\(^{113}\) Dobbins, ‘Europe’s role in nation building’, p. 106. Thus the physical presence of EU troops and police in Bosnia and Herzegovina was interpreted locally as ‘an indication of progress towards membership of the EU’. Cornish and Edwards, ‘The strategic culture of the European Union’, p. 808.

\(^{114}\) ‘Ex-commissioner attacks EU verbalism on Darfur’, *EUObserver*, 20 March 2007.

\(^{115}\) Witney, *Re-energising Europe’s security and defence policy*.

\(^{116}\) Jacoby and Jones, ‘The EU battle groups in Sweden and the Czech Republic’, p. 322.

\(^{117}\) Hedley Bull, ‘Civilian power Europe: a contradiction in terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 12: 2, 1982, p. 136. A more recent analysis also accused the Union of ‘shirking the moral as well as financial and practical responsibilities involved’ in its own ‘innermost defence affairs’. Bailes, ‘The EU and a “better world”’, p. 120.

\(^{118}\) Bailes, ‘The EU and a “better world”’, p. 120.

The ESDP was created at a time when many believed that military force was of declining utility. Yet not only are capability and willingness to deploy force in a decisive manner often crucial to solving humanitarian crises, as illustrated by London’s approach to the intervention in Sierra Leone;¹²⁰ the Russian invasion of Georgia, and particularly the events of 11 September 2001 and subsequent conflict in Afghanistan, have conspired to emphasize that the use of force remains prevalent and may, on occasion, prove necessary in order that European states are able to defend themselves. Thus, European troops are desperately needed to reinforce the NATO force engaged in the fighting in Afghanistan—the outcome of which will impinge directly upon the security of the West. Capabilities, in other words, remain key.

All of this leaves us with something of a paradox. The ESDP has performed far more creditably than many predicted and than anyone had a right to expect. Yet, and largely because of a failure to act on their verbal commitments to enhance their military capabilities, member states are themselves in danger of failing in their international security responsibilities.