"But We Have To Do Something" : the drivers behind EU crisis management operations

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SUMMARY

The notion that European states might devise a framework for institutionalized cooperation in the realm of foreign, security and defence policy is surprising in view of their antagonistic history and the traditional role of foreign policy for national identity and sovereign status. And yet the governments of the European Union (EU) have recently created such a framework. The primary result of the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has been some 20 crisis management operations that the EU has carried out on three continents. This book seeks to identify the main drivers underlying this development. It does so by studying the diplomatic history behind four operations that have been undertaken in the ESDP framework, and by assessing against this record the relative plausibility of different explanations for the intensification in EU foreign policy cooperation. It thereby contributes to the academic literature in two ways: on the one hand, there is as yet little systematic research into the proximate reasons for the Union's bout of activity regarding crisis management operations. On the other hand, this focus on what the EU *does* through ESDP also allows us a new perspective for evaluating what ultimate purposes the policy framework could plausibly serve. This study thereby also weighs in on the theoretical debates that seek to understand and explain why EU governments have chosen to institutionalize their attempts to coordinate security policy, as well as on the question as to what drives European foreign policy-making at the start of the new millennium.

In investigating the causes underlying the ESDP, this book categorizes the explanations prevalent in international relations theory into four categories. Specifically, it distinguishes between potential policy objectives that the ESDP's principals, EU governments, may have pursued in terms of whether these goals were primarily external or internal to the EU, and whether they were driven mainly by power-political or ideational considerations. Linking this heuristic framework with the existing theory-driven literature on ESDP results in four propositions: that EU governments may have attempted to counter-balance the influence of the world's preponderant power, the United States (I); that they may have sought to promote collectively held liberal values (II); that they may have attempted to advance integration within the Union by means of the symbolic power of a common foreign policy (III); or that they used the latter to safeguard or improve their domestic political position (IV). Clearly, these objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but this study seeks to evaluate how much the EU's actions in the ESDP framework, i.e. its crisis management operations, were influenced by these respective underlying drivers.

In order to understand the logic behind ESDP, this book looks at the ESDP output in terms of operations. It particularly focuses on four cases of ESDP action: the military operations in Bosnia and Chad/Central African Republic, and the civilian missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan. This selection mirrors the spread of ESDP operations in terms of their nature, objectives and geographical dispersion. At the same time, it retains what arguably amounted to the most significant ESDP efforts to date in terms of operation size, cost and political risk. While this study seeks to illuminate the positions of whichever actor was particularly important for the decision-making process of each operation, it also systematically gathered those of the three players generally suspected to wield the greatest influence in EU foreign policy: the British, French and German governments. Beyond their alleged influence, these governments also cover the range of what are arguably the most important cleavages dividing national security policies in Europe: their respective preferences for or against association with Washington by default; their relative enthusiasm for robust interventions beyond Europe's borders; and their diverging willingness to see the EU take a greater role in foreign policy-making. Through more than 60 interviews in Brussels as well as in Berlin, Paris and London, this study reconstructs national preferences regarding ESDP operations and analyses how they impacted on EU decision-making processes. These cases are subsequently used to assess the relative explanatory power of the four propositions as to what the most plausible underlying drivers of the larger policy were.

The first case study examines the EU's biggest ESDP military operation thus far, EUFOR Althea. In late 2004, the Union took this operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina over from NATO, a transfer of responsibility that was shaped by two factors: US ambivalence regarding its preferred role in Bosnia and its degree of involvement into the security architecture of post-Cold War Europe more generally; and European governments' wish to collectively play a greater role in Bosnia and international security policy. Regarding the latter, EU governments' preferences largely overlapped. They differed however with respect to the desired degree of attachment to the United States, resulting in complex institutional struggles between the EU and NATO and those governments championing one organization over the other. In the context of the simultaneous transatlantic divisions regarding Iraq, the tug of war between these two institutions has attracted a lot of attention, thereby giving some face-value credence to the balancing proposition. Yet its importance is easily overestimated at the expense of the basic agreement that existed between European governments: namely their shared desire to establish the EU as a potential security provider, with an ability to influence its own security environment. Against the backdrop of the miserable failure of European governments in the Bosnia of the 1990s, Althea served to demonstrate to anxious electorates and the international

community at large that the Union was now in a position to take responsibility in the realm of security.

The second case study analyses the genesis of the EU's rule of law mission in Kosovo, EULEX Kosovo. It argues that the mission was conceived as part of an exit strategy for the international community from Kosovo in the wake of the problems that the UN and NATO faced in administering the territory. The idea underlying the mission, which emerged from 2004 onwards and was largely undisputed across most EU capitals, was that Kosovo's status as an international protectorate had become unsustainable and that the territory's prospective independence needed new and credible international supervision. For a number of reasons, Western capitals agreed that the EU would be best placed to provide that oversight. When the negotiations on Kosovo's status reached a dead end in 2007, EULEX acquired an additional rationale: it also came to serve as a mechanism for managing and attenuating EU disunity and for allowing the EU to remain engaged despite governments' differing views on status. The Union thus emphasized its shared commitment to mentoring and supervising Kosovo's institutions regarding the rule of law even though it remained ambivalent as to what exactly Kosovo was, with 5 EU governments refusing to recognize independence. By weakening the EU's position, this lack of unity betrayed that national political concerns ultimately won out over aspirations for foreign policy coherence. At the same time, the Union's ability to assume responsibility for a process whose finality was harshly contested within the EU attested to its remarkable skills in pragmatically muddling through.

The third case study investigates the drivers behind the EU's police mission in Afghanistan. EUPOL Afghanistan was initiated in response to (perceived) US pressure vis-à-vis EU governments to increase their efforts in stabilizing Afghanistan. In particular, some governments came to see this mission as a means of 'compensating' for their hesitation regarding Iraq and/or enhanced military engagement in Afghanistan. EUPOL Afghanistan was moreover used to legitimate the preceding German engagement in this sector and avoid impending blame for insufficient progress in police training, as well as to carve out a distinctive and visible role for the EU in Afghanistan. While this rationale proved sufficient to prevail over considerable EU-internal reluctance, it fell short of generating the level of active political support that would have been necessary to overcome the many obstacles the mission came to face. EUPOL in particular found it hard to get EU governments to provide for sufficient numbers of suitable personnel, suggesting an emphasis on signalling rather than initiating substantially greater engagement. In fact, EUPOL has been significantly influenced by the exigencies of German domestic politics, in particular the need to avoid the anticipated potential criticisms that Berlin was too close to the unpopular US counter-insurgency campaign on the one

hand, or too coward to assume its fair part of the burden of international security on the other.

The fourth and final operation analyzed in this book took place in eastern Chad and the north-eastern Central African Republic, EUFOR Tchad/RCA according to its French acronym. This operation was the consequence of the initiative of one member state, France, whose newly elected government was eager to demonstrate its commitment to helping alleviate the plight of refugees from Darfur. At the same time, it was in conspicuous alignment with a number of alleged French strategic interests, such as giving a new impetus to military ESDP and lending support to a regime France considered important for regional stability as well as its own influence in Africa. Although this gamut of motives induced other EU governments to provide less than enthusiastic support to the operation, as demonstrated by the difficult force generation process, they eventually agreed on EUFOR Tchad/RCA because no one wanted to be the one to say no to the new French administration. Moreover, some other EU governments also saw potential benefits in the operation, from the ability to do something to alleviate human suffering and to demonstrate support to the UN to the possibility of fostering the development of ESDP and gaining valuable experience for their militaries. The decision-making process in Paris, the predictable scrutiny of the Chadian political economy that the operation brought about, and its lack of value added in bolstering the regime compared to existing bilateral French support all suggest that French neo-colonialism is unlikely to have been a crucial driver behind the operation. This interpretation is further bolstered by the eventual support that the operation received from 'post-neutral' member states such as Ireland, Sweden and Austria, all of whom had little incentive to become a side-kick to unsavoury French policies and to lose their image of embodying impartial UN peace-keeping. The pattern of contributions across the EU moreover indicates that domestic political convenience rather than any geo-political strategy informed this operation. On the whole, the French government sought to visibly 'do something' for the victims of Darfur and was joined by those who could also hope to gain domestically from such an endeavour whereas those at risk from a domestic backlash did not participate in, but only tolerated the operation.

This book then compares the results of these four case studies along two dimensions. The first assessment evaluates the motives of the French, British and German governments respectively across all four operations in order to identify the logic that underpinned pivotal national approaches to ESDP. The preferences it identifies largely concur with those familiar from the literature on their national foreign policies and 'strategic cultures' even as this study interprets them somewhat differently. It finds that Paris was particularly concerned both about operationalizing the ESDP and about keeping it distinct from NATO, a motive particularly strong with respect to the operation in Bosnia, but with repercussions

for Kosovo and Afghanistan as well. This concern over the transatlantic security architecture has traditionally been linked to French objectives of balancing the US, but can just as plausibly be traced to the government's interest in playing to domestic expectations regarding France's specific role in the world. Such an interpretation is suggested not only by the substantial agreement and collaboration between Paris and Washington regarding international objectives in all three cases, but also by the role that domestic politics played with respect to the operation in Chad. British objectives by contrast featured substantial efforts to leverage the EU's emerging security arm in support of US foreign policy, and to keep ESDP as closely tied into, if not as dependent on NATO as possible. Underlying the transatlantic bias was a strategy for wielding influence internationally, albeit one in direct contrast to the balancing proposition: instead, London systematically sought proximity to Washington. Beyond this geopolitical logic, such proximity was however also linked to domestic political incentives, which had New Labour embrace the 'special relationship' as a means of signalling electability. At the same time, London's support for ESDP remained ambiguous in that its investment into ESDP operations was limited even where the latter clearly had a pro-US orientation. The British government thus followed a strategy of exhorting the EU to become more active internationally while not fully engaging – an approach that chimed with the Euro-sceptic disposition of its electorate. Finally, the German government also used ESDP operations to demonstrate its willingness to support US foreign policy, if with lesser enthusiasm than its British counterpart. Simultaneously, it sought to further ESDP for the purpose of European integration more broadly. When political risks beckoned, however, it has subordinated both goals to the (perceived) exigencies of domestic politics.

The final chapter addresses the plausibility of the four putative explanations for ESDP action. With respect to the first, it concludes that ESDP operations were not used to balance the US (I). To the contrary, three out of the four operations covered in this book coincided with US interest in ESDP action, none was opposed by Washington, and none conceivably led to greater EU influence at the US' expense. Both British and German officials moreover cited US expectations of EU engagement as major reasons for undertaking ESDP action. The US even joined one operation, under the EU's political direction, an undertaking hard to imagine were Washington to have seen ESDP as a balancing mechanism. Lastly, whereas French politicians have at times used rhetoric critical of the US, their actions in the ESDP context revealed partial reluctance in actively supporting US objectives rather than intentions of counter-balancing the latter. Paris moreover never saw its preferences realized where the latter were perceived by London (and, to a lesser extent, Berlin) to be targeted against Washington. In fact, the ESDP record surveyed in this book suggests that balance-of-power considerations more generally were notable in their

absence. Considerations of external influence did not relate to relative power, but consisted in the EU's collective quest for stability in its environment and limited contributions to support the prevailing liberal global order.

With respect to the second explanation, that the EU may have used ESDP operations to promote liberal values, this study concludes that the latter had some influence on ESDP action, but that this objective was usually secondary and qualified (II). All four operations were embedded into broader Western foreign policy projects that sought to either promote the rule of law, including for the benefit of local populations, help the latter towards their professed goal of integration into the Euro-Atlantic liberal community, or at least protect vulnerable individuals. Yet in no case were these objectives directly responsible or decisive for the launch of the respective operation. Rather, they were instrumental for regional stability and EU governments' foreign policy credibility. EU governments were overall unwilling to invest significant political capital for the promotion of liberal values, unless and to the extent that they could expect to reap domestic political endorsement. The EU's self-conception as a 'force for good' thus played a role, but was refracted through calculations of anticipated political costs and benefits.

Regarding the third putative driver, this study found considerable evidence that EU governments pursued the creation of an EU security identity as an objective in itself, i.e. that they engaged in ESDP operations for the purpose of showing that the EU was able and willing to act in the domain of international security (III). Whereas not all governments were equally enthusiastic about having the EU act for the sake of flaunting its newly won instrument, the ESDP's early phase was marked by 'flag-raising exercises' and interest even from the British government in showing that the framework worked. However, this study also concludes that the operationalization of ESDP was not primarily driven by the suggested ulterior motive of furthering European integration. Not only did London actively oppose the use of ESDP for anything that smacked of EU nation-building, other governments equally did not expend notable efforts to underscore the Union's contribution to international security. Thus the idea that they sought common foreign action to convince their publics of the benefits of integration does not add up. Moreover, the operations carried out by the EU did not fundamentally differ from those that member states undertook in other institutional settings, indicating that there is little reason to believe that they would generate strong integrationist effects. There are finally only very limited hints that furthering European integration may even have been a motive for EU governments to engage in ESDP. Even the German government, most committed to this objective among the three assessed here, has hardly pursued European integration via ESDP action. In short, whereas the hope for greater European integration may have motivated some politicians, EU action in the ESDP framework was not primarily driven by a European nation-building agenda.

Finally, this book concludes that, of the four proposed drivers, domestic politics provides the most plausible explanation for the ESDP record so far (IV). The objectives of the various operations, and the pattern of contributions that various member states made, were generally in accordance with what EU governments could expect to be domestically palatable while demonstrating adequate international engagement. At the same time, there was only very limited evidence for active societal 'demand' for specific foreign policy measures. National positions rather tended to echo national role conceptions and strategic cultures although the latter were qualified by the specific trade-offs that EU governments faced in each case. Thus, decision-making was characterized by substantial voluntarism on the part of governments, if against the backdrop of perceived domestic political constraints. What the EU did (and did not do) in the framework of ESDP was above all what EU governments believed their societies would accept and expect from them in terms of international security policy – under the constraints that institutionalized multilateral cooperation implied.

In theoretical terms, the results of this study challenge the gist of much traditional international relations theory with its emphasis on systemic pressures and assumptions about the primacy of foreign policy over domestic politics. Offering a framework that directly compares the two, this book shows that considerations of relative external power were largely absent from the EU's decision-making on crisis management operations. This may be due to the exceptional geopolitical context in which ESDP has so far operated, with no clearly preponderant external threat to concentrate minds, as well as the fact that the ESDP constitutes only one subset of the foreign policy conducted by its members. At the same time, this finding is partly contingent on the conceptualization of external power as primarily a means for balancing. Instead, the ESDP's actions were embedded into a larger aspiration that Europeans shared with North Americans: the stabilization if not the expansion of an international liberal order based on individual rights and the rule of law. Although partly self-serving, this shared objective was rooted more in national role conceptions than geopolitical constraints. The pursuit of liberal order was however constrained by its very source; whereas it fed on domestic expectations that European governments do something to improve the world, it was also hampered by a lack of trust on the part of governments that the public would (continue to) support ambitious foreign policy objectives. This interpretation of the ESDP's record finally raises some conceptual challenges that international relations theory generally, but also the analytical model employed in this study still has not solved satisfactorily: namely how and when exactly (anticipated) domestic expectations trigger action by policy-makers. Crucial as it seems for (contemporary) foreign policy-making, this relationship certainly deserves further research.