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The EU, Strategy and Security Policy

Regional and strategic challenges

Edited by
Laura Chappell,
Jocelyn Mawdsley and
Petar Petrov



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1 Strategy in European security and defence policy – does it matter?

*Laura Chappell, Jocelyn Mawdsley and
Petar Petrov*

Engelbrekt (2008) argued that there was a strange paradox between the European Union's (EU) ability to produce policies that possess certain strategic qualities, and its lack of the institutions and concepts that would enable it to reason strategically. This shortcoming has been most marked in the field of security. In the intervening years the EU has developed the institutional structures of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) but CSDP still lacks overt strategic purpose (Kempin and Mawdsley 2013). The EU has failed to find consensus on what and where the CSDP should be active, leading to embarrassing inaction at a time of multiple security crises in the EU's neighbourhood. In the cases of Libya and Mali, this inaction has led some member states to use alternatives such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and unilateral national action. There is no doubt that the CSDP lacks military capacity. It is therefore unsurprising that calls have been made repeatedly to strengthen the CSDP by increasing 'pooling and sharing' (P&S), by reviving Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence, creating a single market for armaments projects and linking EU-wide level military equipment goals to European defence industrial policies (Kempin 2013; Darnis 2013; Future of Europe Group 2012). But while important, such measures do not really tackle the core question of what the member states want the EU to achieve as a military actor.

The special European Council summit in December 2013 drew member state attention to defence, and the CSDP has gathered some new momentum for the first time in some years. The summit did make progress, formalising EU actions on long-discussed issues such as capability development, cyber/maritime security and strengthening Europe's defence industry and to leave no doubt about the seriousness of the matter, explicitly declared: 'Defence matters' (European Council 19/20 Nov. 2013, part I, par.1). However, it also demonstrated that the policy lacks a clear sense of purpose. The piecemeal nature of the summit conclusions revealed a long-observed absence of an over-arching strategy, strengthening the impression that the CSDP is, if not in crisis, at best in a state of stasis.

However, the European Council was correct in its assessment that defence matters. The EU is facing a number of contemporary security challenges such as the slow and uncertain recovery from the financial crisis, terrorism, consistent

declines in national defence spending, the refugee crisis, tensions with Russia over the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, heightened perceptions of energy vulnerability and turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa, including the Sahel region. Moreover, even beyond its immediate neighbourhood, the EU needs to be able to respond to security situations that will have an impact on its trading patterns. For example, the rising tensions between China and its neighbours over sovereignty in the South China Sea have the potential to destabilise some of the EU's most important trading partners. There are new areas of vulnerability emerging for the EU and its member states such as cybersecurity, the need to keep trading routes protected from piracy and the external dimensions of the EU's internal security challenges. All of this comes at a time where other global actors are expecting more from the EU and its member states, be that in terms of the United Nations (UN) 'responsibility to protect' doctrine or the United States' pivot towards the Pacific.

Increasingly, even the strongest military powers in the EU, Britain and France accept that they cannot deal with global security problems on their own, but despite the strength of the argument for collective action, the EU has been unable to act. This has given rise to widespread cynicism about the EU's ability to develop a truly common security and defence policy. Fifteen years since the establishment of the CSDP, the EU is still unable to forge a common strategic vision that goes beyond the general framework of principles established by the European Security Strategy in 2003. In light of these challenges, for some observers the only way in which the EU can make a qualitative difference and demonstrate a clear break with the past is by forging a stronger commitment to the development of a 'common strategic outlook' (de France and Whitney 2013). Similarly, others have called for the development of a grand strategy (Biscop and Coelmont 2010).

Such calls seem all the more pressing given that the security challenges in the next couple of decades will revolve around scarcity of resources (energy, food and water), unemployment (especially in youth-rich countries which are part of the 'arc of instability'), poverty, state failure and immigration (National Intelligence Council 2008 iv–v; National Intelligence Council 2012 ii). In this sense, the root causes of insecurity are increasingly related to the ways in which the individual is affected by these challenges and able to cope with them in a sustainable manner within society. If the EU is to live up to its potential as a comprehensive security actor, then it will need to draw on a range of strategic instruments to respond successfully. In the domain of security and defence this means the skilful application of both civil and military conflict prevention and management instruments to (potential) crises. It may seem as though the development of a grand strategy is vital for the EU to reach its potential as an international actor. The question is whether there is sufficient consensus among the member states to agree a document with more strategic bite than the European Security Strategy. While the experience of the French EU presidency in 2008, which attempted to get such a process underway and largely failed, was discouraging (Irondelle and Mérand 2010), the EU is once again venturing down this

track, with the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, being tasked in June 2015 by the European Council with developing a Global Strategy by June 2016. However, some argue that once again the security dimension of the EU's international actorness is being neglected in the process set out by Mogherini (Major and Mölling 2015; Kaca 2015).

This book does not attempt to develop a grand strategy; rather it asks to what extent the EU is able to use its security policy capabilities in a strategic fashion. The main research question of the book is *to what extent is the EU acquiring any form of overarching strategic framework?* It is also timely as it allows for an interrogation of whether (or not) the EU has the strategic concepts and institutions in place, that Engelbrekt (2008) thought necessary for the EU to become a strategic actor. Throughout the book the EU's claims that it is committed to effective multilateralism and a comprehensive approach to security are examined through different case studies. The Treaty of Lisbon was supposed to bring a new coherence to external action, and so the book also looks at the extent to which the new institutions are producing more coherent external action.

Despite all of the negativity surrounding the CSDP, the EU is being forced to act on security matters. The aim of this book is to take stock of what the EU is doing in geographical areas that it considers important, on security threats that it has defined as vital and what practical progress it is making on some of the known barriers to strategic coherence. In short, it aims to explore the EU's strategic actorness. This will help us define what sort of a security actor the EU is currently and where there are signs of strategic coherence emerging from bottom-up policy actions. This introduction will give a brief overview of the concept of strategy and how it might be understood with respect to the EU. It will then look at the ways in which the EU might be considered to have strategic purpose and then ask how it might operationalise it. Finally, it will introduce the structure of the book and its research questions.

Strategy and the EU

Strategy is a concept that has become ubiquitous across multiple fields of twenty-first century life, but as Freedman (2013: x) remarks, it is still the best word to capture the essence of our 'attempts to think about actions in advance, in the light of our goals and capacities'. This book interests itself in the subject of strategy in its classic sense, namely as Liddell Hart (1967: 231) puts it: 'the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy'. While strategic studies as an intellectual discipline emerged during the early years of the Cold War, strategy as a concept has much earlier origins, with perhaps the most influential being writings from ancient Greece (Freedman 2013). The work of Athenian historian and general, Thucydides, in particular, remains on the syllabi of many military colleges to this day. His account of the Peloponnesian War is thought to offer the first complete theory of grand strategy (Platias and Koliopoulos 2010). Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* and Clausewitz's *On War* also remain influential.

Nevertheless how we think about military strategy today is heavily influenced by the discipline of strategic studies, and it is worth considering where their emphases lie, before we move to relating it to the EU. While many early definitions of strategy relate uniquely to war, more recent strategic studies scholars have broadened this approach. For example, Osgood (1962) agrees with the likes of Thucydides that power is a crucial determinant in any conflict, but argues that the state's capacity for military coercion should be exercised conjointly with economic, political and psychological sources of power in an overall strategy. Strategic studies' Cold War origins and the centrality of nuclear deterrence as a strategic concept meant that for its students, strategy mattered in peacetime as well as during war. Authors like Liddell Hart (1967) developed the concept of grand strategy to mean the devotion of all a nation's resources towards the achievement of national political goals. In other words, strategists will use military means to achieve national goals, but this will be within the wider context of national resources. The state-centrism of strategic studies makes the application of their concepts of strategy hard to apply to the EU as it lacks automatic recourse to these types of state-based resources. Nonetheless Engelbrekt (2008) argues that by drawing on the wider understanding of strategy (as understood by Liddell Hart) the EU can potentially be understood as a type of strategic actor, which could draw on some military means alongside other instruments of power.

What though is meant by a strategic actor? Hallenberg (2008: 3) argues that classically a strategic actor should have five characteristics:

- 1 Possess an independent capacity to gather and evaluate intelligence,
- 2 Be able to formulate political goals and have a hierarchy among these goals,
- 3 Be able to select wisely among the resources at its disposal to achieve these goals,
- 4 Possess the ability to practically implement its strategy on the ground,
- 5 Be able to evaluate its own actions and learn for the future.

However, as Engelbrekt (2008) points out, despite the EU's obvious economic power and political attraction, which allow it to influence global politics, its CSDP activities lack the clear strategic rationale that usually informs the preparation for and conduct of military action in a militarily active nation state. CSDP remains heavily dependent on the good will of certain key member states, and its institutions, while they have increased the EU's capacities, remain weak. Although the EU may have some level of capacity to act strategically, its abilities to anticipate, evaluate and respond to another more cohesive actor are basic at best, as the crisis in Ukraine has shown. Moreover, the military resources of many of the member states are lacking. In short, on traditional measures of strategic actorness, as Engelbrekt argues the EU cannot currently be regarded as an autonomous strategic actor. Therefore it can be argued that the EU is doomed to remain, in Wagnsson's (2008) terms, a passive pole (an economic giant but a

passive subordinate to the US in security matters) or at best a pragmatic re-actor (able to react to predictable situations where consensus exists) rather than a strategic actor in the field of security and defence policy.

Do the military weaknesses of the EU preclude the development of the CSDP into a strategic policy tool of the EU though? Howard (1979) cautioned against reducing the concept of strategy to a measure of the quality of an actor's armaments. Engelbrekt (2008), for example, suggests that turning to the more holistic understanding of strategic actorness offered by Colin Gray may help us develop a more realistic understanding of the sort of strategic actor the EU might become. Gray (1999a: 24) argues that there are 17 dimensions of strategy clustered into three categories: people and politics (people, society, culture, politics and ethics); preparation for war (economics and logistics; organisation [e.g. defence planning]; military administration [e.g. recruitment]; information and intelligence; strategic theory and doctrine and technology) and war proper (military operations; command; geography; friction; the adversary and time). Engelbrekt (2008) argues that in many ways the EU is well-suited to manage the parameters of the first category and that its work towards increasing efficiency and decreasing duplication may help it strengthen the overall military capabilities of its member states in the second category, even if the likelihood of the EU engaging in war proper remains remote. Similarly, Wedin (2008) draws on the French general Poirier's understanding of the different levels of strategy to argue that even if the EU is far from developing a hierarchised set of political objectives to constitute the aims of a grand strategy, it is gradually acquiring the 'ways and means' at an operational level, which may enable the bottom-up rather than top-down development of strategy. Indeed Biscop and Norheim-Martinsen (2011: 80) underscore that 'acting *European* has become a source of strategic identity for the EU and an end in itself', rather than the EU's actorness being based on a series of strategic objectives. It is these more limited ambitions for the EU as a strategic actor, and the potential of Wedin's (2008) proposal that the EU may be able to develop bottom-up strategy based on operational experience that inform the structure of this book.

It is undeniable that referring to the EU as a strategic actor at all raises the question of whether we are reifying, that is transforming the abstract to concrete, the EU as a security power. Is the EU as a security actor no more than a cluster of institutions and procedures, and thus what collective security actions emerge, are simply the combined actions of the principal member states? While we accept that the member states remain crucial to the success or otherwise of CSDP policy actions (see the chapter by Chappell, Mawdsley and Whitman in this volume), we would argue that there is a dimension to CSDP that goes beyond this. In a similar discussion on foreign policy, Smith (2011) rightly points out that compared with 30 years ago, it is evident that we can see more cooperation, integration and foreign policy action; this can also be observed in the security domain. CSDP is not, as understood by this book, a policy area that can be separated out from other EU security actions (see the chapters by Barrinha and Carrapiço and Shepherd). Moreover, the institutionalisation process itself can be thought of as constitutive.

Holland (2002) suggested that for every external policy action, the EU goes through an internal process of identification and legitimatisation and an external process of justification and projection. Birchfield (2013) takes this argument a stage further in arguing that the EU is an innately reflexive actor. Arguably, this process would be expected to be at its most extreme when the EU deals with security-related matters, and certainly more recently where military operations are concerned, this is the case. In some ways, however, this book challenges these assumptions in questioning the extent to which the EU *is* reflecting on its security actions and thus behaving as a strategic actor. However, we would argue that if not currently a reflexive security actor, the EU has the potential and aspirations to be one, and thus that it is legitimate to treat it as an emerging security actor.

The EU's strategic purpose

If we accept that the EU can be considered as an emerging security actor, the next step is to ask what its strategic purpose is. While strategy is about matching means with outcomes as outlined above, it is necessary to take a step back and ask: means and outcomes for what core purpose? The issue here lies with the military power connotations of strategy which hardly fit an actor such as the EU, which professes to hold a 'comprehensive approach' to security to include a multitude of different instruments up to and including the use of force (European Council 2003). As Biscop and Norheim-Martinsen (2011: 65) emphasise, 'the essence of strategy ultimately boils down to the extent to which any instruments of power – military as well as non-military – further a perceived political end'. While the EU might be lacking a 'grand' strategy there are still elements of strategic thinking as evidenced in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS). Two key concepts here are a comprehensive approach to security as mentioned above and effective multilateralism, involving working with partners in the context of international law. Although these could be considered to be an EU 'way of conducting war', what the ESS misses out is a comprehensive outline of what the EU's values and interests are (see Biscop and Norheim Martinsen 2011: 70; 79). While a member state such as Germany found certain elements of the ESS to be challenging, for example the possibility of taking preventive action (Chappell 2012), at the same time the ESS was largely uncontroversial, mainly because in contrast to the US National Security Strategy it identified threats but did not specify a set of strategic responses.

For Solana, the key to making the ESS exist in reality rather than just on paper was the development of a common EU strategic culture, which would 'improve decision-making, facilitating rapid and, if necessary, robust intervention in crisis situations' (Mawdsley and Quille 2003: 12). It is unsurprising that much of the academic literature, which has delved into whether the EU's actions amount to anything more than the EU member states' eclectic national interests, uses strategic culture. Taking Gray's (1999b) notion of culture as context, a strategic culture approach seeks to understand the actions of a security community relating to crisis management through *inter alia* a focus on historical experience,