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European Union Grand Strategy and Defence: Strategy, Sovereignty and Political Union

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Abstract

In its purest essence the European Union (EU) is a political project with a commitment to reaching a finalité politique of a federal Europe. The paper focuses on EU Grand Strategy with special reference to defence co-operation in Europe in a transatlantic context. The paper analyses the prospects for an EU strategy in the defence field and also at ways to explain this using suitable theoretical lenses' as frameworks for analysis including concepts drawn from the fields of comparative strategy and international relations. The EU is a political project and the paper will also ask how far the defence field is a necessary and contingent part of the drive towards political union in Europe and what this tells us about the prospects for an EU Grand Strategy in a transatlantic context. The paper will in particular focus on a series of case studies to analyse the prospects for a coherent EU politico-military culture, how such a culture operates and what it means for EU Grand Strategy in a transatlantic context. What does this tell us about the defence area in terms of strategy and also about the state of the European integration project itself?

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) political union project has been at the root of the broader European integration process since the early 1950s from Monnet onwards via Schuman, de Gasperi, Adenauer, Spinelli, Fouchet, and Delors to name just a few key EU-related thinkers and strategists (Burgess, 2012). In its current inception political union implies three key characteristics: First, limited versus full economic federalism with central powers to tax, spend, to control the money supply and to generate welfare. Second, political union comprises enforceable laws from the centre versus discretion at the national level with EU law supplanting national law. Third, political union implies direct legitimacy through EU-level supranational institutions such as the European Parliament (EP) (Dullien and Torreblanca, 2012, pp.1-7). See Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Three Dimensions of Political Union

	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3
Model 1	Limited economic federalism	Rules-based	Indirectly legitimised
Model 2	Full economic federalism	Discretionary	Directly legitimised

Source: Sebastian Dullien and Jose Ignacio Torreblanca, 'What is Political Union?', European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, 2012, p.7.

The EU is an aspiring international actor in world affairs predicated on a broad-based European Security Strategy (ESS) (ESS, 2003) covering all aspects of security and defence. To what extent is there a consistent EU strategic culture, and to what extent has this strategic culture influenced EU foreign policy against external threats in the form of a grand strategy? How far is the EU developing into a centralised security actor and to what extent is the Union guided by in its external political actions by federalised laws at the "centre" in Brussels? Factors which contribute to the development of a federal strategic culture comprise the availability of finance, military and civilian capabilities, national threat perceptions, the availability or otherwise of centralised legal powers, the degree to which EU interests are directly at stake, and the position of other relevant actors' including those of the member states. Joined-up EU strategic culture is important in policy terms if the EU is to have an impact in the wider world via a joined-up grand strategy to challenge diverse security threats. The paper hypothesises how far the EU is able to engage in wider system management in the provision of collective goods via a consistent strategic culture and accompanying grand strategy. The paper also analyses how far we need to revise given notions of grand strategy in light of the EU's holistic experience of security beyond the nation-state.

Over the past 20 years the EU has faced unprecedented challenges in a rapidly advancing international environment to which it has been slow to react including the rise of China, a declining United States, environmental degradation, international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. It is hypothesised that the EU lacks a defined strategic culture and concomitant integrated grand strategy to maximise Europe's potential influence in global politics to manage the world's key security challenges. How far is this, the case? What

contribution does the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) make towards the building of a strategic culture in Europe in the defence field? What does this mean for the building of an EU defence policy that is guided by a grand strategy? What does this mean for the wider integration process and for the EU's political union project and what does this tell us about the state of the European integration process?

EU strategic culture is a relatively under-researched field but has gained saliency in the literature in recent years. Work in the field has been done by Howorth (2007) and (2010) and Biscop and Coelmont (2011) to define how we might think of strategic culture and how the EU responds to this in its search for a grand strategy. Meyer (2005) and (2006) has contributed a constructivist analysis of strategic culture in the EU to the debates. Menon has fused institutionalist and realist approaches towards CSDP in his work (Menon, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). Chappell has written on CSDP from the perspective of strategic culture and role theory (Chappell, 2012). Luis Simon has written on CSDP strategy and crisis management (Simon, 2012). Mattelaer has written on EU military operations and their relationship to strategy (Mattelaer, 2013). Michael E. Smith has combined aspects of institutionalism and realism in his analysis of CSDP (Smith, 2011). Kempin and Mawdsley have written on the relationship between CSDP strategy and US hegemony (Kempin and Mawdsley, 2013). In 2011 a special issue of Contemporary Security Policy was devoted to CSDP and strategic culture with articles on different aspects of EU security policy and strategic culture from various theoretical perspectives (Schmidt and Zyla, 2011; Haglund, 2011; Norheim-Martinsen, 2011; Rynning, 2011; Pentland, 2011; Schmidt, 2011; Haines, 2011; Kammel, 2011; Peters, 2011; Zyla, 2011). A similarly theoretically-aware collection of articles on CSDP was also published as a special issue of Journal of Common Market Studies in 2011 using Foucaultian theory, policy networks, realism, social constructivism, institutionalism and varieties of social theory (Bickerton, Irondelle and Menon, 2011; Rynning, 2011; Toje 2011; Meyer and Strickmann, 2011; Menon 2011; Hofmann, 2011; Merand, Hofmann and Irondelle, 2011; Merlingen 2011; Bickerton, 2011).

In this analysis EU strategic culture is defined as ideas and patterns of habitual behaviour which members of a community share via imitation and learned behaviour (Gray, 2006, p.9). EU grand strategy is defined as `the purposeful employment of all instruments of power available to a security community' (Gray, 2007, p.283). This captures the transnational and soft power holistic nature of the EU as an international actor and also its embryonic military profile. In this paper grand strategy means a comparison of: (a) intentions (b) capabilities and (c) implementation and outcomes of EU policy (Biscop, 2011). The paper focuses on EU strategic culture as applied to CSDP as part of a broader EU Grand Strategy and particularly in the context of relations with the Atlantic Alliance – the other great defence and security provider in Europe and globally. More broadly the analysis will question how we can conceive of new transnational forms of grand strategy in light of the EU's holistic experience of security cultures beyond the military and nation-state dimensions of the concept.

The CSDP Experience So Far: CSDP under a NATO Umbrella?

The key EU institution engaged in CSDP operations is the Political and Security Committee (PSC) (Dzable, 2011, pp.211-228). Let us introduce the paper with some basics. CSDP operations can either be civilian, military or a combination of the two. CSDP civilian missions encompass activities such as election monitoring, stabilisation, educational projects, peacekeeping and so forth. CSDP military operations involve the stabilisation of a territory, for example, in Europe or beyond via the use of a mixture of civilian and military instruments. Military operations are financed by the EU member states which participate in the operation. Costs as such lie where they fall and this can disincentivise states from participating in EU military crisis management operations. Pure EU military missions – if such a thing exists in practice – are deployed as a last resort derived from the range of external tools available to the EU in the foreign affairs field. CSDP military operations are dependent on the participating EU member states to enact the terms and conditions of the mandate of the given operation. In practical terms only France and Britain have a semblance of world class defence capabilities but a high percentage of member governments are able to muster penny packets of military capabilities to enable CSDP military operations, particularly Italy, Spain, Poland, Germany and Romania. CSDP operations take place under the concept of permanent structured (PESCO) that was enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty 2009) (Biscop and Colemont, 2011). PESCO is intergovernmental in nature and is dependent on the EU's member states capabilities and intentions. PESCO itself extends beyond the confines of CSDP and does offer a convenient framework for developing national cooperation in the EU to mount CSDP military crisis management operations on a coalition of the willing basis.

The experience of CSDP from its inception in 2003 to present today a decade later has mainly been concerned with delivering military civilian missions and civilian-military operations under the EU's crisis management concept. This is a niche marketing position by the EU concentrating on what it can do in its Neighbourhood and is linked to broader economic and development policies especially through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Thus far the CSDP experience has not specifically been in the defence field per se beyond tackling maritime piracy in the Indian Ocean in Operation Atalanta and in peace support operations. CSDP civilian missions and military operations have been mainly focused on post-conflict reconstruction, election monitoring, peace keeping/peace enforcement, providing assistance to development priorities and so forth. The main defence provider in Europe (when we are speaking of conventional territorial defence and power projection) is still the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In practice CSDP operates under a NATO umbrella providing goods and services for crisis management in Europe and in its Near Abroad whilst NATO concentrates on collective defence. CSDP's successes have been qualified and limited to crisis management. As the former head of the European Defence Agency has argued:

> ...European defence ministers have repeatedly launched new plans of action [in the EU and in CSDP]...to little or no effect...With an entrenched economic crisis across Europe, and almost universally falling defence budgets, `pooling and sharing' is now on everyone's lips...Yet, away from the ministerial declaration and the conference hall, virtually nothing changes (Witney, 2013, p.3).

This is ironic given the emerging two-tier nature of the Atlantic Alliance where Europe and America seem to be drifting apart on Grand Strategy. The Obama administration's international priorities are changing away from Europe towards a destiny in the Asia-Pacific region. Former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates argued several years ago that Europe was not pulling its weight in transatlantic relations and globally, which has been reinforced by his successors Leon Panetta and Chuck Hagel. CSDP was absent during the Libya crisis of early 2011, and this could have been an ideal test for its military capabilities in the framework of the EU military crisis management doctrine. The EU failed to go beyond the trilateral Anglo-French-American military action as this was a NATO operation in all but name. The EU one surmises has an incentive to develop CSDP accordingly to deal with such eventualities? In an era when the US is withdrawing resources from Europe, Washington is engaged in a dual policy of retrenchment and counterpunching. Retrenchment, in this case, meaning from traditional allies and counterpunching in interdisciplinary high intensity areas such as counter-terrorism, low-intensity conflict, counter-insurgency, intelligence liaison with selected partners and so forth. Essentially, the US wants Europe to take on more burdens from the US global perspective and the EU's member states still seem to want to concentrate regional on crisis management in Europe's Near Abroad through CSDP. There's the rub which also extends to the Atlantic Alliance and Europe's unwillingness to accept American conceptions of a "global" NATO that focuses on managing global security. European conceptions of the Alliance are more regionally focused on the North Atlantic area. Europe is in fact possibly in danger of becoming far less important in US grand strategy unless it becomes more relevant and capable militarily beyond crisis management? Following this line of argument it would also be in the EU's best interests to develop CSDP capabilities for good practical military reasons and to increase the level of defence integration in Europe. This also has broader implications for the European integration project itself and the political union project. If the EU and its member states are unwilling to go beyond what exists the prospects for a federal EU defence policy and the creation of a federal Europe are attenuated.

As such it might be argued that CSDP is subject to federalizing processes of policy-making that have been present in the European integration process since the 1950s (Burgess, 2012). CSDP might well be subject to federalizing processes without having reached a federal organisational form. Furthermore, it might well be that states which themselves organise their governance around federal principles might be more willing to federalise their approach to foreign and defence policy than unitary states (Koenig-Archibuigi, 2004, pp.137-174). Federal states might well be more used to sharing power between central and lower-level organisational units and are therefore more willing to accept a loss of sovereignty in external foreign and security policies. This is the issue here: whilst France and the UK are the leaders of CSDP, especially in defence terms, federal and states such as Germany and Belgium are probably more willing to give national sovereignty away in order to help build the political aspects of the European integration project. This means that the prospects for political union

and the broader European integration process are attenuated by a lack of federalised leadership on the part of unitary Britain and France, but also that Germany is unwilling to take on leadership in the defence field mainly for historical reasons. These prospects, however, have to be balanced with the emergence of the highly federalised EEAS and its associated federalised processes. Much will depend on leadership of this institution and perhaps it is time to exchange the present leadership for a new one with greater credibility and global vision in the wider world.

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