This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

The EU's Common Security and Defense Policy and the Mali Crisis

https://www.e-ir.info/2013/08/16/the-eus-common-security-and-defense-policy-and-the-mali-crisis/

METTE EILSTRUP-SANGIOVANNI, AUG 16 2013

The crisis in Mali – sparked by the March 2012 coup and the subsequent Islamist takeover of the northern part of the country – provided another opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its unity and readiness to defend key European foreign and security policy goals. As part of Europe's 'broader neighborhood', Mali is strategically relevant to the EU. Building security and prosperity in regions bordering the Union, and preventing spillovers of crime, migration and terrorism from failing states are key priorities of the European Security Strategy. The threat of an Islamist takeover in Mali led to a large displacement of people and raised the specter of a new sanctuary and training ground for jihadists less than 1.200km from Europe's Mediterranean border. In short, Mali was precisely the kind of crisis that the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP) is geared to address. Consider further that the Malian government explicitly called for international assistance to defeat the Islamist insurgency, and that a unanimous UN Security Resolution authorizing the use of force was swiftly secured by the French, and there would seem to be few obstacles to rolling out a CSDP mission.

As we know the EU failed to act. Despite having monitored the crisis in Mali for more than a year prior to the French intervention, the EU Council failed to issue any plans for military action. When Paris launched an intervention on 11 January 2013, other EU members offered strong vocal support. The UK agreed to supply surveillance aircraft, Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Spain sent transport planes. Yet none were willing to join France in combat. As French forces carried out airstrikes against Islamist rebels, EU leaders on January 17th decided to establish a long-awaited Military Training Mission (EUTM Mali) to coach Malian troops. As critics have noted, even this small gesture (which draws heavily on French personnel) came rather too late, as the bulk of Malian government troops were by then headed into combat alongside the French soldiers.

Critics on both sides of the Atlantic have been quick to point out the Union's failures. Mali has been cited as yet another proof that the CSDP is mainly a rhetorical construction, a 'paper tiger'. As so often before, however, most analysts have been content with describing the symptoms of the EU's failings—the Union's military contributions are small, unevenly shared, poorly coordinated and come too late—rather than scrutinizing the underlying causes of these failings. Rather than take a critical view of what can and should be done to improve Europe's capacity to address security challenges, most commentaries thus end with the customary call for member states to increase their military contributions in order to match stated ambitions. But is this realistic?

In an ideal world, Europeans would undoubtedly do more to project political, economic and military power into its wider neighborhood in order to surmount humanitarian crises and looming security threats. In the real world it is unlikely that they will do so anytime soon. It's not merely the ongoing economic crisis that prevents member states from backing up the Union's CSDP. It's the simple logic of collective action. As Mancur Olson showed almost five decades ago, any arrangement for the joint provision of defense and security is subject to collective action problems. Since any amount of security supplied by one group member automatically also benefits others, no state has an incentive to contribute to the good once the state that benefits most from the provision of security has provided the amount it is individually willing to supply.[1] This is especially true for a regional security arrangement such as CSDP, which focuses on out-of-area conflict management, including conflict prevention, peacemaking/keeping, and prevention of terrorism. The potential benefits of such activities (such as increased global stability, reduced migration

flows and long-term economic benefits from trade) are diffuse and uncertain, whereas the costs are certain, immediate and confined to those who contribute. The well-known theoretical upshots are uneven burden sharing, with smaller states freeriding on the efforts of larger partners, and generally suboptimal provision of security.

This does not imply that joint security schemes such as CSDP must fail. But given the public nature of the good, one of two conditions must hold in order for adequate security to be supplied: 1) the group must feature one or more states that are significantly more powerful and wealthy than the rest and that therefore a) value joint security goods sufficiently highly to be willing to supply a disproportionate share, and/or b) are able to extract significant contributions from other members; 2) there must be substantial private (i.e. excludable) gains to states from contributing to public benefits.[2] In NATO, the US has long played the role of hegemon, willing and able to supply security for its allies but also to use its dominant position to pressure and coax its partners to contribute to collective defense. In the UN, large developing country contributions to international peacekeeping are often explained by the fact that participation brings private benefits in the form of pay and valuable training for national troops. In the EU neither condition is met. In contrast to NATO, the EU lacks a state large enough to be willing to unilaterally supply a significant amount of out-of-area conflict management, or powerful enough to extort contributions from its partners. There are few excludable benefits to participation in CSDP missions. Although conflict-management may boost status and bring long-term economic gains for countries directly engaged, these private gains are uncertain.[3] Since countries can enjoy most of the benefits of successful out-of-area conflict management without actively participating, they are likely to free ride.

Mali illustrates this logic well. Given its colonial past and geographical proximity to North Africa, France has a particular stake in the conflict. France has strong commercial links in the Sahel region and maintains several military bases in the area. To be sure, no European government would like to see Islamist groups taking over control in Mali. But whereas Paris actively worries that an Islamist takeover could lead to increased acts of terrorism against France, to most other EU states, the threat from radicalization in the Sahel appears elusive and the benefits of intervention uncertain. Germany does not perceive an acute threat from unrest in North Africa. Spain, Italy and other southern EU members do fear instability in North Africa. But since they could reasonably expect France to ultimately address the Mali crisis (France has intervened militarily in Africa more than 30 times since 1960) they have not felt compelled to act. This pattern is similar to the crisis in Chad in 2008 when the EU *did* authorize a joint military mission. After spending ten months seeking to persuade its European partners to contribute personnel and hardware, France ended up providing 55% of the 3.300 troops (90% if one counts direct support for EUFOR by the French *Epervier* force in Chad).[4] The added legitimacy that Paris had hoped would derive from a joint EU (as opposed to a unilateral French mission) was rather undermined by political discord and reluctant participation from other member states.

To be fair, it's not only Europeans that have passed the buck in Mali. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was expected to take over the campaign once France had paved the way with airstrikes. However, pledges from African states were slow, and the troops eventually deployed by ECOWAS have been described as poorly trained and incapable of keeping the insurgents at bay. Even Washington limited its contribution to logistics, satellite intelligence and in-flight refueling for French warplanes. The lesson seems clear; medium-sized states such as France simply lack the clout to lead substantial 'coalitions of the willing' in defense of their national interests.

The French realize this. Viewed from Paris, CSDP can in some ways be seen as an attempt to circumvent the logic of collective action. From the start, CSDP has been predominantly a French project. The hope was that CSDP would provide a vehicle for pursuing French foreign policy goals while diffusing the costs across the Union. This projection was based on the optimistic expectation that—despite divergent threat perceptions and uneven incentives to contribute—a joint commitment to a *European* security project would lead other EU members to support French efforts—materially as well as diplomatically. This has worked only to a limited extent. Of seven EU military missions five have been in Africa—mostly in areas considered as the French *chasse gardée*.[5] Yet, as France has learned the hard way, other EU members will not go to war simply to display 'European solidarity' with French security goals. Thus, France has ended up supplying the lion's share of troops for each EU mission. During the period 2003/2010, France contributed 26% of all forces deployed on EU military interventions. Even adjusting for population size, this is vastly more than smaller EU members and well ahead of other large states such as Germany (10.2%) Italy (10.8%)

and the UK (6.7%).[6] It is interesting to note that while Europeans contributed some 35.000 troops (man-years) to EU-led missions from 2003-2010, during the same period they contributed more than 230.000 (man-years) to NATO missions. Clearly, commitments to the Atlantic Alliance come first.

France appears to have learned the lesson. Although President Francois Hollande publicly stressed the need for a robust European response to the Mali crisis it is unlikely that he expected a strong result. Certainly he did not bother waiting for fellow EU-members to pledge support before launching an intervention. It is particularly striking that although a French-German-Polish (Weimar) Battlegroup was on standby during the first half of 2013, theoretically ready to be deployed within 5-10 days, Paris never considered this option, turning instead to African nations for reinforcements. On this basis, it is tempting to conclude that even France has given up on CSDP.

What are the wider lessons from Mali? The clear lesson from the first decade of CSDP missions is that, despite a string of lofty treaty declarations, Europeans are not prepared to stand side-by-side in defense of regional and overseas interests. Mali has served to reinforced this conclusion. Where core national interests are at stake, member states must consequently be prepared to fight alone. France was able to intervene swiftly in Mali thanks to a wide network of pre-stationed troops and military support structures in neighboring countries. However, a lack of strategic airlift capacities would have made a large-scale unilateral French intervention further afield more difficult. This presents a dilemma. Due to growing budgetary pressures, EU countries are moving rapidly towards pooling and sharing of military assets as well as role specialization for costly niche capabilities.[7] Yet, specialization invariably enhances mutual dependence. As Anand Menon notes, if core military assets are managed in common, it will be increasingly difficult to pursue national security priorities unless they receive full European support.[8] Given a lack of strategic unity, the risk is that—much like the current EU battlegroups—'integrated' European military forces will be on perpetual standby. This seems a dangerous route to go down.

Meanwhile, what is the way forward in Mali? The French intervention has temporarily rescued the Malian government but much remains to be done to stabilize the country politically and economically. This is where EU competences are strongest. EU post-conflict stabilization focuses on political and legal capacity-building and economic re-development. In doing so it draws on Community funds for long-term foreign aid rather than ad hoc voluntary contributions. As a result, the EU's civilian reconstruction efforts are less prone to collective action problems and generally more efficient than its military exertions. The obvious conclusion is that, for now at least, civilian crisis management and reconstruction is where Union should focus its collective efforts, leaving joint military interventions to NATO.

—

Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni *is a Lecturer in International Studies at the University of Cambridge and Fellow in International Relations at Sidney Sussex College. Her work focuses on institutional design, transgovernmental networks and network theory, non-proliferation policy, and regional integration. Her most recent publications include "From Advocacy to Confrontation – Direct Enforcement by Environmental NGOs (forth. ISQ) and "Adjusting to Multipolarity: American Decline and the Reshaping of the Global Institutional Order" (forth. Nobel Institute).*

[1] Olson and Zeckhauser 1966. Economic Theory of Alliances.

[2] Sandler, Todd. 1977. *Impurity of Defense,* Shizumu, Hirofumi, and Todd Sandler. 2002. "Peacekeeping and Burden-Sharing, 1994–2000". *Journal of Peace Research* 39(6):651–68.

[3] See e.g. Shimizu and Sandler, opcit.

[4] 'The Military Balance 2008/2009' (Paris: IISS), Table 3. 1,200 troops in the French Operation EPERVIER supported EUFOR/Chad.

[5] The EU deployed military missions to the DRC in 2003 and 2006, to Chad in 2008, and Darfur in 2007. The Union also has a naval force fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia. The only two EU military training missions have both been in Africa (in Somalia and Mali).

[6] Data of troop contributions by each EU country to EU-led military missions, 1999-2009 is available from author upon request.

[7] "Military Balance", 2010.

[8] Menon, Anard. 2009. Empowering paradise? The CSDP at ten. *International Affairs* 85(2): 227-246.

About the author:

Dr. Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni is Senior Lecturer in International Studies at Cambridge University. Her research interests include international organization, international non-proliferation regimes, transgovernmental networks, international environmental advocacy and European security and defense policy.