

Does the European Union Need an Army?

Written by Martin Mark Jones

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MARTIN MARK JONES, FEB 16 2011

Many different readings exist regarding the genesis of the modern-day EU. These range from a simple trade bloc to haul Europe out of post-World War Two recession, to the encouragement of a prosperous market for US exports, to a liberal-democratic bastion against Soviet expansionism and a peculiarly liberal-intergovernmentalist approach to conflict resolution in an era dominated by political realism. In reality, an understanding of all these interpretations is essential to comprehend the complexities of the EU.

In the post Cold-War world, where the certainties of the bi-polar system in which the territorial integrity of the West-European peninsula was both put into question and assured by the NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation, the EU now finds itself confronted with questions regarding its geo-political role and military identity. In particular, the Union is juxtaposed between those who believe the EU should remain a wholly civilian (soft) power and those who argue that it should develop a military (hard) dimension. Further still, there exist a lively debate between those who seek to develop an autonomous military identity (Europeanists) and those who see Europe's military future in NATO (Atlanticists).

This essay will examine these questions, initially considering the soft-power characteristics of the EU (1.0), broadly those situated in the former, pre-Lisbon Treaty, first pillar. It will then turn to discuss the cleavage that has developed between those who can broadly be called military Europeanists (2.1) and Atlanticist (2.2) before briefly and finally considering possible alternatives to the *impasse* (3.0).

1.0 Soft power

"[The EU] may not be a superpower...but it is certainly a global power" (Piening, 1997)

Since its inception, the modern day European Union has been strongly identified as an economic giant and civilian power. Representing over 28% of global GDP in 2009, it is the world's largest economy (International Monetary Fund, 2010) with, some would argue, commensurate economic gravitas in international affairs (Van Rompuy, 2010).

On one side of the debate between Bull (1983) and Duchêne (1973) regarding the contended civilian nature of the, then, EC, Duchêne argued that the EC (EU) represented a civilian power largely devoid of the need for "armed force". Broadly commensurate with this argument, Cooper's succinct adage "[trade] policy *is* foreign policy" (1972) and Nye and Keohane's (1972) acknowledgment of the "declining role of force and the growing importance of economic interdependence" has led to a sense that the European Union could represent a post-modern, post-Westphalian and *civilian* power, devoid of the need for an army.

Although soft (civilian and economic) power is usually portrayed as the "carrot" and hard (military) power the "stick", this is not necessarily the case as Duke and Hill point out (Duke, 2003) (Hill, 2003, p.137). However, this paper disagrees with Smith and Hill's analysis that, as a civilian power, the EU uses persuasion and attraction solely (Hill, 2003) and finds Smith's characterisation of soft power as not being compatible with coercion a little flimsy (2005). As the EU's recent visa embargo on the entourage of the outgoing President of Côte d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, demonstrates (Council of the European Union, 2010) the Union is more than willing to fashion a *stick out of carrot* and use civilian instruments as coercive measures if necessary.

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With the list of prospective candidate countries shortening and the 17-member Eurozone caught in the midst of a sovereign debt crisis, the prospect of membership of the EU and thus the Euro, long held to be one of the Union's largest carrots (Duke, 2003), is rapidly fading as an external relations tool. In the interest of economy the long practiced debate over virtues of a soft-power, normative Europe will not be repeated here, only to note that with concerns over the efficiency of aid (Duke, 2003) and a perceived hypocrisy in trade policy with third parties, soft power Europe certainly has its critics as well as its proponents.

2.1 – CSDP

The European Union is little more than an “economic giant, political dwarf and military worm” – Eyskens (Whitney, 1991)

On the other side of the Bull-Duchêne debate, Bull (1983) argued that any civilian power of the EC (EU) was contingent upon the military power of the member states, although he did not rate the likelihood of the creation of CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy).

As history in the Balkans tells us, Europe's soft power might was ultimately insufficient to end or even prevent conflict in its own hinterland. Former US Secretary of State Baker's 1992 quip that “we don't have a dog in that fight” so strikingly underlined there was a real risk that, with the Cold War overlay removed, the USA no longer had such an intimate interest in European defence and security and exposed the naked dependency of European defence on NATO, and thus US, assets.

Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to suggest that Jacques Poos' 1992 infamous comment regarding “l'heure de l'Europe” (Rupnik, 1999) was accurate for entirely the wrong reasons (Whyte, 2005). For although it would be inaccurate to detail the deficiencies of European defence during the period, and thus tensions within NATO, as being the sole father of CSDP the crises in the Balkans take much of the credit for prompting European consideration of CSDP (as ESDP, European Security and Defence Policy, was renamed in the Lisbon Treaty) (Duke, 2003).

The establishment of CSDP as a formal EU framework can be traced back to the 1998 St. Malo Declaration between France and Britain, calling for “the Union [to] have the capacity for autonomous...military forces” (St. Malo Declaration, 1998). It is ironic, therefore, that the progenitors of such a framework can also be said to represent the poles of the rift that divides the Union over the question of the role of CSDP (Deighton, 2002) and thus, a major theme of this essay.

Behind the diplomatic overtures, the contemporary role of CSDP appears to have two broad drivers. The first being a desire to develop an independent EU military identity (2.1a) and secondly, one might argue, a seemingly contradictory yet pragmatic mechanism for enhancing the EU's civilian virtues (2.1b), as briefly discussed above.

2.1a

It has been suggested that at the time of St. Malo France, often cast as the least trans-Atlantic of EU governments (Cini, 2007), aspired to create a European military identity autonomous of a NATO that was seen to have lost its *raison d'être* and upon which, as previously discussed, Europe relied at its risk and perils. Since then work on CSDP has promised much but is yet to truly be put to the test with only a handful of moderate deployments in its history (European Union, 2010).

Although CSDP in 2011 includes an institutional framework led by the Council, that-is-to-say still firmly intergovernmental, it is important to note that there has been a degree of Brusselisation of the process, most notably the earlier establishment of the EU Military staff (EUMS) and the co-institutional role of High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy within the Council and as Vice-President of the Commission.

With no standing army or immediate internal or external military threat, with the challenges of completing Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the pressures financial and sovereign debt crises of the end of the decade, it is

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perhaps understandable that despite the declaration of partial CSDP operability in 2001 (Council of the European Union, Laeken, 2001) the Helsinki Headline Goal, set in 2000 (initially for completion by 2002 and then in 2010), had still not been met in 2010 (Sturm, 2010).

There is also the sense that Europe's identity as a world power may be severely undermined if it were still reliant, over 6 decades later, upon US military buttressing. At a supranational level, the need for an EU army, therefore, is not merely a question of insuring yourself from the whims of an old ally in a changing world environment when you are no longer the primary point of focus but also a question of pride and self-determination (Keohane & Valasek, 2008). To this extent the Lisbon Treaty's Mutual Defence clause (Art 42(3) TEU-revised), inherited from the WEU and strikingly similar to Article V of the Washington Treaty, also acts to underscore the EU's status in the world.

The Berlin Plus agreements allow CSDP to develop a degree of operational autonomy from NATO whilst also pointing out the striking capabilities gap that hampers the future potential for the autonomous use of European military force. Given this it is difficult to conceive of a situation in which CSDP would ever be anything more than a NATO fiefdom whilst still reliant upon US military assets. Perhaps *ever closer union* in defence spending, avoiding the duplication, that sees the EDA countries' military expenditure around half that of the USA with incommensurate effectiveness, could help close such a capabilities gap (Duke, 2003) (European Defence Agency, 2009). We will return to this point later.

2.1b

Elaborating Bull's point relating to the relationship between soft and hard power (1983), Stavridis points out that the EU's undoubted soft power is best enhanced by the establishment of a military identity of some kind (2001). Smith rightly points out that the concept of a Platonic civilian power being is deficient (2005) and the existence of the credible threat of hard power is perceived both as vital for the future use, and past failure in the Balkans, of the EU's soft-power (Cini, 2007) (Duke, 2003) (Lord Bilimoria, 2010). As Deighton observed, EU structures remain driven by soft-power and "not as a security actor" (Deighton, 2002). Therefore, one could argue that CSDP is as much a function of the EU's soft power identity as any search for a military dimension *per se*.

Although *prima facie* a CFSP, as opposed to CSDP, development it is worth noting that since Lisbon, Kissinger may, to an extent, finally have his desired European phone number in the shape of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, currently Catherine Ashton. It may be interesting to consider to what extent Kissinger's rhetorical question acted as a stalk-horse for the establishment of such a role and whether such an outcome may have been reached had his Defense [sic] colleague have made a similar remark relating to.

There is also a sense among those seeking greater integration within the Union that the European project would be incomplete without a security dimension (Duke, 2003). It is interesting to note the incarnation of the tension between the multiplicity of actors and interests within the Union that has produced a degree of what could be said to be the ultimate institutional spill-over, that is to say in defence. However, set against this background of apparent neo-functional supranationalism one must also note the firmly intergovernmental nature of a defence framework that has failed to live up to its own benchmarks and goals. Perhaps defence cooperation *à la* CSDP is one aspect of sovereignty that even the most pro-European member state of significance is not willing to cede.

2.2 The EU and NATO

As outlined in the previous section, there is a strong argument for an autonomous European military capacity, independent of NATO. However, there are those, such as the UK at the time of St. Malo, who would see CSDP more as a European "alliance within [the] alliance" capable of baring a greater burden for its own defence (Bull, 1983) (Deighton, 2002).

Indeed, such a role for CSDP need not violate Albright's 3Ds (no diminution of NATO, no discrimination and no duplication) (Albright, 1998) or incur the wrath of the infamous 1991 Bartholomew telegram (Van Eekelen, 1998) and would surely be welcomed by those, such as Dulles (Trachtenberg, 1999), who question the extent to which the US

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will continue to tolerate a powerful EU economy free-riding on NATO defence.

It is upon the historical context of NATO that the European proponents of a strong European affiliation with the alliance base their arguments. A sense of loyalty toward the USA for its commitment during the Cold War, especially noted among the former Soviet Bloc, the UK's sense of kinship (along the lines of the Anglo-sphere) (Chalmers, 2008) and fears of duplication of what is perceived to be an already functional defence alliance all contain valid points that help explain the ongoing vivacity and EU members' subscription to an institution which has out-lived its enemy. Indeed, NATO and the EU share 21 members in common and are both based in Brussels. However enmity between Cyprus (EU but not NATO) Turkey (NATO but, still, not EU) provides an ongoing impediment to closer cooperation between the two institutions.

In the relatively macabre report on the CSDP outcomes of the Lisbon Treaty, and thus its own effective dissolution as the Union's defence body, the WEU called upon its former members to continue the development of "closer security relations" with the US and other non-EU NATO members (Assembly of the Western European Union, 2010). For smaller members of the EU and NATO, both organisations provide a prism through which they are able to project a disproportionately increased international presence. The significant bloc of smaller powers that are members of both organisations provide an effective counter-weight to the traditional Franco-German *moteur* which for so long pushed the case CSDP.

Therefore, a degree of incumbency and inertia exists with EU member states and NATO, few of whom, for a variety of reasons as outlined above, are willing to forsake the former for the latter (Keohane & Valasek, 2008). Even if Europe's need for an umbilical relationship with NATO has passed, consider the proposed European ABM defence system for proof that the alliance is still regarded by many as the primary provider of security, particularly in relation to the nuclear umbrella that NATO affords it (The Economist, 2010). Despite pretensions of heading toward a non-nuclear world and warming relations between the West and Russia, it may be interesting to consider how quickly the EU's proponents of autonomous CSDP may re-convert to NATO enthusiasts should relations with Russia once again turn frosty, or the Islamic Republic of Iran acquire nuclear weapons (The Economist, 2010) (Ashton, 2010).

3.0 Concluding remarks

As we have seen, the question over whether the European Union needs a military force, what form that should take and the extent to which European states, as opposed to NATO, should form that force is an intricate one. With EMU slowly proceeding, shaped by recent crises, Defence is perhaps the last great taboo in the European Union's integration process.

The Union's failure to satisfy the Helsinki Headline Goal is symptomatic of difficulties in coordinating competing national ideologies, rivalries, allegiances and varying military competencies across a membership for which the primary attraction of the EU is its civilian power. However, it is questionable as to the extent to which the hard-power identity of the European Union *need be* enacted in a CSDP style framework. The Lisbon Treaty provides for Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence (PSCD) [Art. 46(6) TEU-revised] which effectively allows for a small *avant-garde* of states to act as the Union's collective army (see Biscop and Coelmont for an interesting analysis of PSCD (Biscop & Coelmont, 2010)).

Although potentially overly ambitious and divisive, such a concept is interesting (Biscop & Coelmont, 2010). The UK, France, Germany and Italy account for over 70% of EDA expenditure (European Defence Agency, 2009) which rises to more than 80% with the inclusion of Spain and Poland and any degree of cooperation within such a group massively increases the potential for the reduction of duplication of assets, procedure and processes.

As the recent Franco-British Defence and Security Co-operation Treaty (UK-France Summit, 2010), warmly endorsed by the Council, (Council of the European Union, 2010) illustrates, in an age of austerity substantial defence cooperation between few militarily significant, though globally moderate, EU member states could provide a more pragmatic "coalition of the willing" model for future EU defence policy without the quagmire and haggling that CSDP risks representing.

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