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Integrating the EU International Approach:  Complexity, Flexibility and Responsibility

At most, other countries in the world view the EU as a selective and inconsistent "soft power" actor that often cannot reach a consensus even for this application of power. At least, especially in circles in the United States that focus almost exclusively on the "military" War on Terror, the EU is seen as a non-actor.  This paper maintains that the EU role is under-valued for many reasons.  Much of the work the EU does in international relations is behind-the-scenes in "contact" and other informal groups.  Other joint actions it takes may not be directly attributable to the EU because the mode of cooperation may be played outside this framework, for example, the EU in NATO, in the United Nations, in transatlantic relations and other contexts.

Furthermore, this paper maintains that the EU is a significant actor, and its significance is growing as security threats take new forms.  The complexity afforded the by EU institutional set-up and the diverse membership—not to mention the understanding on the part of Europeans that complex solutions are the only ones appropriate to changing global circumstances—puts the EU in an advantageous position to confront dangers and conditions of instability in the world.  Flexibility provides the EU with a toolbox:  with various options for pulling together "coalitions of the willing" and "committees of the willing".  In addition, flexibility enables the EU to negotiate a multi-polar world and utilize multi-tiered decision-making.  Finally, responsibility for global problem-solving must be consciously assumed by the EU as a way to improve its legitimacy in the eyes of European citizens, majorities of whom express support in their countries for the development of European foreign policy and security policies. Responsibility also requires the EU to extend the internal lessons it has learned, in terms of peace-building and democracy.  Finally, the EU has a responsibility in transatlantic relations to stand for its values and to put forth its view of the world.  This responsibility is especially pressing as the United Sates is intent on enacting its view of the world and as competing views of the EU and United States have dislodged the anchor of transatlantic relations.  Biscop summarizes a major conceptual difference:

> Clearly the EU and US view the world differently.  In the words of a European diplomat: for the US, the world is dangerous—for the EU, the world is complex.[i]

Complexity: Specialization and Networking

If one harks back to the European Coal and Steel Community, its institutions were intended to create a situation of interdependence among member countries.  Engagement instead of conflict was the intention of the founder, Jean Monnet.  The now legendary

"concrete achievements" (the way in which Europe would be built) that were begun with the Schuman Declaration were intended not only as stepping stones to a higher political end but an overlapping construction that would eventually interlock states in a variety of tasks. It was, thus, declared over a half-century ago:

> The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.

Throughout the 1960s the situation of interdependence impressed itself on international relations. World leaders began to meet with each other more regularly needing to adapt to a changing international environment, the biggest change being that domestic decisions could not longer be made without reference to international events and politics. As the Council of Minsiters became more sectorized, meeting in various specialized formations, heads of government made their entrée into "Community" affairs in 1975. The decision to form the European Council, as these meetings came to be called, was politically motivated, top leaders wanting to do their parts on the international stage. However, the advent of the European Council was as much an adaptation to interdependence as it was a "high" political staging event. Bulmer and Wessels realized the extent to which interdependence caught countries without the tools to manage the new international situation.

Fast-forward into the new century, and the evolution of the Council of Ministers could not have been only the product of design; its complex specialization can only be the result of accumulated experience from European integration, but also experience accumulated from twenty-seven governments and their particular political histories. Globalization has now replaced interdependence as the situation that requires new means of coping. As much as governments around the world try to reduce bureaucracies, de-regulate and strive for more transparency, the EU among them, governments are not becoming less bureaucratic nor easier for publics to understand. Europeans leaders have previously complained about the complexities of U.S. government when policies got bogged down at various levels, pigeonholed in some congressional committee or worse. Now EU-27 vies with the United States in terms of multi-tiered decision-making and diversity of decisional authorities. The vagaries and minutiae of Coreper I and II have to be explained to people concerned with EU decision-making. Publics in both regions of the world seem to be confounded, giving their politicians low marks.

In the United States, given a favorable political context, an extremely powerful executive can potentially cut through congressional delays and whip bureaucracies into shape, not to mention taking the fight to rogue states. The image comes to mind of President Bush as an action figure who possesses special powers to get his way. Europeans also have a caricature for the American president, that of a cowboy. It is "safe" to say that the EU does not have the equivalent office. However, it is more interesting to consider whether the complex system the EU has in place that requires constant bargaining, compromise and negotiation is one that serves a unique purpose. It is also worth considering that the complex specialization the EU has institutionalized makes it especially functional for the post-September 11 security environment, or for that matter, security situations that pose complex threats.

The EU poses a fascinating model as a network that can be activated to do the complex tasks that are involved in contemporary security, whether the challenge is accounting for and securing nuclear material or countering terrorism through law enforcement, intelligence sharing and capacity building in "failed states", one of the EU's most promising contributions is that it is conditioned to respond to "networked" threats.

As an organization constructed on complicated transnational links throughout the EU and with Third countries, not to mention links with international and non-governmental organizations, the EU exists amidst a variety of ties that bind, ranging from informal to legal ones. Like the terrorists or other international criminals, the *modus operandi* of EU is networking. Scholars have long commented on the "density" of the EU owing to the myriad of officials and politicians caught up in its workings, the frequency of their interactions, and commonality of purpose. EU expert Helen Wallace states, "For some time, networks have been a preferred way of describing the character of decision-making and policy development in the EU," referencing Héritier and Peterson in this regard.[ii] Reflecting on the work of Markens Jachtenfuchs, Wallace makes the following observation,

> European governance is a more fluid and malleable set of ways in which governments in the regular meaning of the term—from the participating countries interact with a wide variety of political, societal, and economic actors to respond to pressures and demands for public policy and for political aggregation or arbitration.[iii]

Another quality of the EU network is that it is expansionary. Traditionally, when countries have operated in an expansionary mode, they have used their military strength to conquer territory or to influence other countries to acquiesce in their policies. The EU, a late-comer militarily, has gone about it differently, utilizing an approach which is now recognized as "soft power" based on the seminal work of Nye.[iv] The EU uses methods that are designed more "to attract" than to punish or threaten. It has adopted the posture of a role model in its oft-stated adherence to international norms and law. The capacity of the EU to conduct effectively "soft power" is large; it matches the criteria Nye considers advantageous in mustering soft power. Nye remarks the countries with most capacity are "those with multiple channels of communication," "whose dominant culture and ideas are closer to prevailing norms," and "whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international values and policies."

Supranationalism is also a quality that enables complex interactions on the part of the EU. Supranationalism in the EU, not only has provided the member governments with more capacity for common decision-making and action, but according to Mark Leonard, has increased their power in a transformative fashion. Instead of wielding the power of "spectacle", in reference to the power the United States pursues, they now wield the power of "surveillance".[v] Leonard refers to the EU regulatory and legal regimes that determine the behavior of citizens in Europe. He continues, "Europeans understand that the key to their success is the fact that their surveillance is voluntary and mutual."[vi] It is also subject to the rule of law, understood in both European and American legal traditions as law that is known to the public and applied equally. Whereas temptation in the War on Terror is to resort to secrecy so that we do not alert terrorist to our plans and to make

extraordinary laws for our enemies, the strength of the surveillance society is that citizens understand and recognize the need for rules and participate in ordering their societies while believing that the great hope is that the rule of law is applied universally.

The rule-bound regime that the EU has used in countering terror financing, that incorporates international institutions, the United Nations Counter-terrorism Committee and the Financial Action Task Force, has had its share of successes. Although the negotiations that precede regulations in the EU are difficult and can be protracted, once in place, they are enacted by 27 countries. They have "automaticity", as they do not require national implementing legislation, and they have legal authority and all that implies, especially democratic legitimacy.[vii]   Supranationalism to the extent it provides surveillance, not to mention how much it benefits international cooperation, may be one of the most constructive tools in the War on Terror, and, ironically, one of the most efficient owing to its legal impact.

In summary, the European Union brings to the table a new set of tools. No longer content to serve only the role of force multipliers, they serve as multipliers of intelligence, state capacity (especially through the specialized Council of Ministers and Commission) and relations through the geographic reach enlargement has brought. Europeans have pioneered a new form of international cooperation, that of supranational cooperation, that provides legal authority and the power of surveillance. In short, they have created a network that presents an incomparable set of relations for prosecuting terror and other transnational crimes that foster insecurity.

Flexibility: Coalitions of the Willing and Committees of the Willing

Complexity has to be managed, and flexibility presents a reasonable way in which to bring organization to otherwise unwieldy processes. The argument against "flexibility", in terms of enlisting coalitions of EU actors that change based upon the issue and members' willingness to serve, has often centered on the small countries. As it goes, small countries are suspicious of a *directoire*, especially if is consists of Germany and France. As important, opposition to a *directoire* stemmed from concerns that the "directors" possessed the power to dominate the others and would be tempted to use that power. There was also the fear that France and Germany could drag the other EU members into situations that put them in danger or, at least, entangle them in ways they did not choose.

At a time when U.S. power in the world was trusted as protection for the weak, smaller countries preferred to throw their lot in with the United States as opposed to France or Germany. In reference to the possible development of European defense capacities in the early 1960s, Buchan states,

> But the smaller states will be unhappy if such a development means precluding the direct contact of European governments with the source of virtually all Western strategic power, the United States.[viii]

The bases for this seemingly eternal argument have shifted with successive enlargements. As a result, the foreign policy interests of EU countries are more diverse, the result of new geographic linkages. The EU has become a much more multi-polar

organization than it was previously. The constellation of power in the Union presents many more possibilities of groupings. For example, EU3 (adding Britain) has become a regular feature of EU diplomacy with Iran. Ironically, the EU supports that diplomacy because it does not want the United States to unleash its strategic power against Iran. The politics in the EU have changed so much with the unilateral turn and militant posture of the United States under the Bush administration that most European countries, especially small ones, no longer maintain expectations of being able to influence the only superpower. According to Josef Joffee,

> Singular power [that of the United States], especially power liberally used, transformed a festering resentment into an epidemic, and so the anti-American obsession that swept the world contained an at least semirational nucleus—the fear of a giant no longer trammelled by another superpower.[ix]

When friends of America intend to send a warning about France and Germany wanting to "counteract" U.S. power, many Europeans take it as wishful thinking. The Europeans are not alone in believing the U.S. does not represent their interests. Joffee believes that "power unbound" in the case of the United States gives the reason "why 50-73 percent of the people in NATO countries prefer more independence from the United States, why even larger majorities throughout the world (from 58 percent to 85) don't want the United States to remain the one and only superpower.[x]

It makes sense that in this climate of insecurity about U.S. actions, the EU is seeking ways to assert its power. Flexibility provides the "toolbox" for the EU approach, to enlist an American term that has irritated Europeans in their relations with the United States in NATO. Javier Solana expressed this irritation when he commented that Europeans would prefer to be "partners" with the United States rather than "tools". Of course, Europeans would also prefer to be partners with tools.

Flexibility leaves options open for the EU. Some observers will regret the "looseness" of these arrangements, resurrecting the arguments made against the United States' decision to go to Iraq with a "coalition of the willing" instead of relying on the tried and true arrangements of NATO. However, technically speaking, it seems the EU has a range of options with flexibility, from "committees of the willing" to "coalitions of the willing." Those actions that are taken in the context of the EU, comprised exclusively of EU members, and subject to the institutional constraints are not properly thought of as "coalitions". They are committees, in the sense of cabinet committees in member countries since they share the same values (ideally that will be enshrined in a Constitution) and are governed by the same institutions. However, extending cooperation beyond the EU is also an attractive option, enlisting like-minded countries in an action, especially those countries that want to join eventually the EU or are linked to the EU through other sets of arrangements.

Flexibility also enables the EU to link up with international organizations. The EUFOR intervention in the Congo in 2006 occurred on the basis of a UN request to assist security during an electoral process. The UN already had peacekeepers in the field, United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

(MONUC)  In reporting to the UN Security Council, French Representative Olivier Lacroix said "the deployment in 2006 of a new European Union-led force had been a major development for the Union in securing its defence policy."[xi]  The EU intervention in Lebanon followed a similar "flexible" pattern.  According to Sven Biscop,

> In spite of the troops wearing the blue helmet, UNIFIL-plus is thus clearly seen as an EU presence, by all relevant parties, and with all the implications that carries for the EU.  The Council conclusions themselves state this clearly: "The significant overall contribution of the Member States to UNIFIL demonstrates that the *European Union* is living up to its responsibilities.[xii]

Responsibility and Transparency

As the United States grapples with the prospect of failure in Iraq resting squarely on its shoulders, unable politically to extricate its troops, U.S. officials can only imagine a situation that they could look elsewhere to spread the blame (and to assist an exit).  As the EU plays its part in trying to find solutions in the Middle East, EU officials can only imagine that they have shouldered their responsibilities.  The United Sates sees itself compensating for the laxity and irresponsibility of its allies.  The EU sees itself trying to exert damage control over the fall-out from the gross and tragic over-stretch of the United States.  The worst indictment on both powers is that they have failed to make cooperation the standard in a world that grows more complex and dangerous by the day.

The EU's identity is especially underdeveloped in the context of transatlantic relations.  This situation is partly owing to the refusal of the United Sates to admit the EU as a significant international actor.  The EU as a "flexible" actor is too often misapprehended by U.S. officials as a non-actor.  The cumulative identity of the EU is difficult to grasp.  One must take into account the multiple contexts in which EU countries conduct their foreign and security policies in order to assess fairly the cumulative identity.

The identity problem of the EU, especially in transatlantic relations, is also partly intentional.  Member countries tread lightly where the United States is concerned.  They parse their words in diplomatic speak.  They do not often want to make their disagreements known.  Therefore, it is not always possible for outside observers, even citizens of the EU, to know where the EU stands in relation to the United States.

By an account, the EU has been late to take responsibility for international security issues, therefore, inviting the kind of criticism in Robert Kagan's work.  Kagan makes an argument which Americans often make amongst themselves: that Europeans do not want to pay the price, whether in blood or treasure, for global security.[xiii]  This argument stems from the burden-sharing debates in NATO throughout the 1960s and 1970s and this century's version of the dispute, over increasing spending for modernizing militaries.  It continued over Iraq with Europeans not rallying to the cause.  It is hard to convince Americans that Europeans choose not to invest in things military because they are in the process of rethinking military-based power, especially if they really do not believe this themselves.

The European Security Strategy (ESS) is a key step in making the EU a responsible international actor. It is a strikingly transparent document and, in this, different from other statements artfully crafted to be open to interpretation and not to offend. According to Lebl,

> EU documents are well-known for their bureaucratic density and lack of public appeal, but this text is clear and direct and provides for the first time a "vision" of EU strategic policy. It identifies terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failed states (e.g., Afghansitan, Sudan or Somalia), and organized crime as the key security threats facing all the member states.[xiv]

Whether the world is complex or dangerous, or both, ambiguity can no longer be the path forward for the EU. The public can only be mobilized around a policy that is comprehensible and transparent to them. They have repeatedly demonstrated in polling that they support the development of European foreign and defense policies. As important, it is not secret that the bureaucratic EU needs to find ways to appeal to the European public. Menand makes an important point:

> Ambiguity is thus harmful in and of itself. More specifically, one of its by-products has been a tendency on the part of some Europeans to play fast and loose with their rhetoric concerning the EU's security aspirations.

When the United States asks the EU to be responsible, it has specific military-related tasks in mind. However, the "responsibility" the EU seems willing to assume so far seems to be a very different kind of responsibility, that of finding alternatives to using force to solve global problems and pursuing security on new levels, for example, addressing the roots of conflict and protecting the environment. The EU not only conceives of security in novel ways but it pursues security using non-traditional means, most notably that of supranationalism. Its challenge is to continue to articulate its policy, to publicly (and diplomatically) confront differences with others, including the United States, and to debate where it has failed to take responsibility. It is not enough for the EU to be identified with a passive role, that it has refused to develop into a military power rejecting the traditional "great power" role. The cynical view is that the passivity of the EU has reinforced a dynamic in transatlantic relations that encourages the United States to take charge to fill the gap. Developing a new paradigm with the goal of transforming international relations is a future-oriented project and a worthy project. However, it should not be seen as more important than finding immediate ways to address contemporary security issues and crises. Inis Claude famously said of "national sovereignty" that it was the doctrine of irresponsibility. Europeans must be sure that is not also the case with "pooling sovereignty", or else the hope of their potentially transformative project is lost.

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<sup>i</sup> Biscop, Sven. *For a 'More Active' EU In The Middle East",* Egmont Paper 13 (Brussels, Academia Press, 2007), p. 21

<sup>ii</sup> Wallace, Helen. "The Council: An Institutional Chameleon?" *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions,* Vol. 15, No. 3, July 2002, p. 339

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p. 337

<sup>iv</sup> Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Publ;icAffairs, 2004)

<sup>v</sup>Leonard, Mark, *Why Europe Will Run The 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), p. 39

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>vii</sup> Interview with UN official, New York, January 2006

<sup>viii</sup> Buchan, Alistair. *NATO In The 1960's: The Implications of Interdependence.* Revised Edition. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1963), p. 55

<sup>ix</sup> Joffe, Josef. Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 121-122

<sup>x</sup> Ibid, p. 126

<sup>xi</sup> "European Union Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo", Security Council Report, SC/8936, http://www.un.org/NEWS/Press/docs/2007/sc8936.doc.htm

<sup>xii</sup> Biscop, Sven. *For a 'More Active' EU In The Middle East"*, Egmont Paper 13 (Brussels: Academia Press, 2007), p. 6

<sup>xiii</sup> Kagan, Robert. *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe In The New World Order* (New Yiork: Vintage Books, 2004)

<sup>xiv</sup> Lebl, Leslie S. "European Union Defense Policy: an American Perspective," *Policy Analysis*, No. 516, 24 June 2004