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The EU's Role in European Security

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Introduction

While NATO remains the essential lynchpin of Europe's defence, the EU has, in recent years, come to play an increasing role in the wider, mostly non-military, aspects of its Member States' security. This is because it has the power to act in various aspects of security: political, economic, home affairs (the latter includes policing, crime and justice) and, to a limited extent, military operations outside the EU. The bulk of EU security work is in the political, home affairs and economic security areas.

The EU's ability to combine all aspects of security policy enables it to act in ways that NATO and the United Nations cannot. NATO and the EU are complementary organisations. Hard power needs to work in tandem with soft power. The EU can use its economic power to persuade third countries to change their behaviour in two ways. First, in negative terms, by taking sanctions against them – as it has done over Iran's nuclear programmes and Russia's annexation of Crimea and attacks on Ukraine. Secondly, in positive terms, by offering countries such things as improved trading links through privileged access to the EU's Single Market, or development aid to improve their economies and to develop stable, democratic institutions.

Successive US administrations have expressed the wish for the Europeans to take more responsibility for security in the European neighbourhood. Britain has a vital interest in the stabilising of the countries that surround the EU, and has played a leading role in developing policies towards them with our European partners, with whom we share common interests and values.

At a time when the UK and other European countries face unprecedented security challenges internally and externally, this paper examines the various aspects of the EU's role in European security; there are other Senior European Experts papers that provide further detail on the mechanisms for this, including the Common Foreign & Security Policy, the European Arrest Warrant and the External Action Service.¹

The Security Challenges

The countries of the European Union face a wide range of security threats today. Terrorism, people trafficking, the trade in illegal drugs and organised crime all threaten the internal security of Member States but they are also all problems that move across borders. This cross border dimension requires international co-operation as no one Member State can successfully address these problems on its own.

¹ See the 'Security' section of the Senior European Experts website

Recent terrorist attacks in Europe have demonstrated just how important international co-operation is if such attacks are to be prevented and offenders brought to justice. While some have claimed these attacks are due to the weaknesses of the EU, it is difficult to see how cross-border terrorism can be tackled without greater international co-operation, which in Europe is co-ordinated primarily by the EU.

To the east and south of the EU there are major conflicts, which have led to considerable loss of life, extensive economic damage and large movements of refugees. The conflicts in Ukraine, Syria and Libya in particular have adversely affected EU Member States and created a sense of insecurity around the EU's borders. The unpredictable behaviour of Russia under President Putin, including its willingness to flout agreements on European security to which it is a party (including the Budapest Memorandum guaranteeing the sovereignty of Ukraine), and to finance anti-EU, populist forces in Europe, makes it an especial cause of concern.

Europe's dependence on both imported energy and imported food makes it vulnerable to disruptions in supply. In addition, much of its energy resources come from unstable regions of the world via long supply lines that are themselves vulnerable to attack or disruption. Countries like the UK are highly dependent on food imports; participation in the EU's Single Market for food helps mitigate the risks associated with this.²

These are the current security threats but threats evolve and change over time and the EU has to have a policy framework that is sufficiently flexible to adapt to such change.

How the EU acts

The EU and its Member States seek to utilise all the various tools at their disposal, in a co-ordinated and comprehensive way, to respond to security threats. If this is done it can have substantial influence on the behaviour of third countries and/or significantly improve the response of its Member States to a particular threat.

Politics and diplomacy

One of the most powerful instruments to increase European security has been the expansion of the EU to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe following the collapse of Communism and the Warsaw Pact. This enlargement of the EU has played an essential role in stabilising the new democracies and helped them to establish market economies in an area formerly dominated by the USSR. This is highly relevant to the Balkans today, following the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, where the accession process is important to the security of the region and of Europe as a whole.

As a group of 28 countries whose collective economy is the largest in the world and whose population of 500 million adds to its weight, the EU can be a powerful political force. By using its networks and connections, such as the fact that two of its larger Member States are permanent members of the UN Security Council, and that 22 of its Member States are also NATO members, the EU can make its voice heard in the world.

² See Tim Benton, *Global Food Imports and UK Food Imports: Resilience, Safety & Security*, Economic & Social Research Council, 20 March 2012, p. 6

The EU has strong ties to other powers, for example, the United States, and it has a range of diplomatic tools to advance its policies, including the strengths of individual Member States, the High Representative for the Common Foreign & Security Policy and the External Action Service.

The EU's leading role in resolving the long-running dispute between Iran and the international community over its nuclear programmes (the High Representative led the talks with Iran's representatives) was an example of the way the EU has become a significant actor in global diplomacy.³ The negotiation with Iran demonstrated how the UK, France and Germany, working with the High Representative, could make a real difference in international relations. The EU also played a significant role in negotiating an important agreement between Kosovo and Serbia in 2013 to enable them to move closer towards normalising relations between them, reducing another potential threat to regional security.⁴

As an organisation of 28 Member States the EU is sometimes slow and cumbersome in its response, partly because foreign and security policy decisions require unanimity and Member States often hold different views. But because of the size of the EU, both economically and politically, when it can reach a common position it does have impact.

Justice and home affairs

The EU has expanded its involvement in justice and home affairs policy over the last 25 years at the request of Member States in response to the need for greater co-operation against cross border crime and terrorism.

The main instruments available to the EU are:

- The European Arrest Warrant, which has enabled the extradition of 1,000 wanted people to the UK and the deportation of over 7,000 wanted persons to other EU Member States;⁵
- Europol – the EU's police co-operation agency which facilitates joint operations against cross border crime and terrorism and has in the last two years set up counter-terrorism and cybercrime centres;
- Eurojust – the EU's justice co-operation agency which assists prosecutions that cross borders, including through the sharing of information.

The main value of the European Arrest Warrant is that it depoliticises extradition and speeds up the process. The average time taken to extradite a person has fallen from a year to a matter of weeks. The speedy extraditions of people from Belgium wanted in France in connection with the November 2015 attacks in Paris are an example of how effective the Arrest Warrant can be.

Europol and Eurojust are co-operative agencies that Member States choose to use in order to improve their effectiveness in catching and prosecuting criminals and terrorists. Through Europol, UK police forces have access to extensive national criminal record databases (the

³ Federica Mogherini, 'Iran deal – an historic day', European Union External Action Service, 14 July 2015

⁴ European External Action Service, 'Serbia and Kosovo reach landmark deal', 19 April 2013

⁵ National Crime Agency, *Historical European Arrest Warrants statistics: Calendar and Financial year totals 2004 - April 2015*, 1 October 2015, cited in HM Government, *Why the Government believes that voting to remain in the European Union is the best decision for the UK*, April 2016, p. 10

European Criminal Records Information System).⁶ The UK also participates in the EU's Schengen Information System (SIS), which is used in border control, contains details of those wanted for serious crimes and enables the sharing of vehicle registrations.⁷ EU co-operation includes the sharing of some intelligence but most of the exchanges of operational intelligence between Member States take place on a government to government basis rather than through the EU.

EU and NATO: complementarity

All EU Member States are members of NATO except Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden. Those who are members of NATO look to it for their territorial defence and, in recent years, for larger-scale "out of area" military intervention like Afghanistan or Libya. It is likewise to NATO that, for example, Estonia looks for military support against any threat from Russia. The EU has no territorial defence role, although the Treaty of Lisbon does contain a mutual assistance clause. The EU's military interventions have been smaller scale than NATO's, mostly in Africa (for example, in Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo), although also in Bosnia and a naval operation against piracy off Somalia

But what the EU has that NATO does not is what has come to be called its "comprehensive approach" to security issues: its ability to combine an appropriate mix of all the policy means at its disposal, whether military or civilian. These include positive support through economic, financial, development or trade measures and promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. They also include coercive measures, notably economic and travel sanctions, for example, over Iran's nuclear programme and Russia's military interventions in Ukraine.

Military operations outside the EU

Since the creation of the European Security and Defence Policy in 1999, confirmed in the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, the EU has developed a capability for military operations outside its borders. It has no army of its own, but rather military structures (a Military Committee) and force generation procedures which enable voluntary contributions from Member States to military operations. All defence policy decisions require unanimous agreement.

A series of EU military missions have shown that it can add value, often in areas where NATO does not operate. Its largest missions have been in Bosnia, where it continues to provide the forces to ensure peace is maintained, and off the coast of Somalia, where its anti-piracy operation (run from the UK by the Royal Navy) has dramatically reduced the incidence of piracy in the Indian Ocean (see box below).

Development

Development policy provides aid and expertise to enable developing countries to improve their economies and to strengthen their civic institutions. Partly this is done to promote European values but it also links to the EU's security policies as development aid promotes political stability and the rule of law. The EU and its Member States are the world's largest donors of development aid with over €2.5 billion being spent on development co-operation

⁶ See European Commission, 'ECRIS (European Criminal Records Information System)', 23 March 2016

⁷ See European Commission, 'Schengen Information System', 16 December 2015

in 2016 and €1.1 billion being spent in humanitarian aid.⁸ In addition, over €3 billion a year is contributed by Member States outside the EU budget to the European Development Fund, which finances longer-term development aid and technical assistance.⁹

Trade

EU trade policy is linked to wider economic policy objectives (see below) but it too has a role in security. For example, in the case of Iran the EU used economic sanctions as a means of bringing about a negotiated diplomatic settlement. Furthermore, the success of the EU Single Market makes it a magnet for third countries. This desire for privileged access gives the EU considerable leverage. It has used this to negotiate agreements with third countries that open up trade in both directions, creating a win-win situation in which both EU Member States and the third country concerned gain. The 1995 agreement with Tunisia (currently being renegotiated to expand its scope) and the Association Agreement with Morocco are examples. The EU now has trade agreements with 60 countries and is negotiating more.

Economic security

In economic security the EU has two aims. The first is to enhance the economic resilience of its own Member States through measures that deepen the Single Market, increase competitiveness and open up new trade markets with third countries. All of these things are intended to enable Europe's citizens to get and retain work. Secondly, it works to strengthen the economies of third countries, including those of its neighbours, to improve opportunities for trade and to strengthen the economies of other countries. Economic growth reduces the deprivation and lack of opportunity that encourages crime and terrorism, leads to illegal migration and which causes political instability.

EU energy policy has developed rapidly in recent years in response to growing concerns about energy insecurity. The EU imports the bulk of its energy, largely from Russia, North Africa and the Middle East. It has been developing an energy single market within the EU in order to increase competition and open up new sources of supply. This benefits neighbouring countries, such as Ukraine, that are similarly over-dependent on imported energy.

Food security is a long-standing EU concern and was one of the original justifications for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).¹⁰ The EU is now able to meet all its food needs partly because of the CAP but also because of its increasing openness to international trade.

⁸ See European Commission, 'EU annual budget life-cycle: figures', 16 October 2015

⁹ See European Commission, *Annual Accounts of the European Development Fund 2014*, COM (2015) 379 final, 23 July 2015

¹⁰ Franz Fischler in Arlindo Cunha & Alan Swinbank, *An Inside View of the CAP Reform Process: Explaining the MacSharry, Agenda 2000, and Fischler Reforms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. v

Somalia: an example of EU security policy in action

The EU's action in Somalia is a good example of how it can bring together both civilian and military measures to improve security. In this case the EU has:

- led the anti-piracy operation off the coast;
- provided the bulk of the funds for the African Union forces fighting the al-Shabaab rebels;
- provided aid to Somalia to develop its economy and its civic institutions;
- supported refugees from the fighting in neighbouring Kenya;
- supported the Somali peace process (with the UN and the African Union) to try and end the conflict.¹¹

All of these actions have contributed towards the reduction in piracy, the expansion of the remit of the legitimate Federal Government of Somalia and the revival of the peace process. They contribute to European security through the protection of merchant shipping passing through the Indian Ocean; through tackling the terrorist insurgency in Somalia and in neighbouring countries; and by reducing the risk that instability in the country will lead to further migration to Europe.

Conclusion: bringing it together

The EU is not – and has never tried to be – a substitute for NATO or for national action to protect security because, as the Treaties say, national security is primarily the responsibility of Member States. Where the EU adds value is in its ability to bring together the various tools at its disposal in pursuit of a common aim.

The interventions in Somalia, the peacekeeping operation in Bosnia, the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, and the leadership of the Iran nuclear talks are all examples of where the EU has played an important and useful role. Its work in policing, crime and justice is low profile much of the time but it is also of great value.

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¹¹ See European External Action Service, 'EU Relations with Somalia', 28 March 2016



Senior European Experts

The Senior European Experts Group is an independent body consisting of former high-ranking British diplomats and civil servants, including several former UK ambassadors to the EU, and former officials of the institutions of the EU.

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