European Interventionism: Lessons Learned and Future Pathways

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President Emmanuel Macron, in his 2017 Sorbonne speech, introduced his aspirations towards a European strategic culture beyond the European Union (E.U). – the European Intervention Initiative (EI2). The heart of this vision is to transform Europe into a highly capable defense player in the international arena, carrying out effective and urgent joint military operations. So far, EU structures have stagnated in reaction to demands for rapid interventions, from Rwanda and Kosovo, to the current refugee crisis. Much of this failure relates to common EU operational pitfalls, such as slow decision-making among the member states, reflected in the more recent defense initiatives such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) (Mölling and Major 2018). In times of transatlantic turbulence and populist movements, it is unsurprising that France is exploring alternative ways of intervention, beyond EU and NATO frameworks. But what does this new initiative spell for the future of EU common security, Western military interventions, and the transatlantic relationship? Furthermore, what can we conclude about the EU's past and future policies of intervention?

In this paper, I first synthesize the nature of EU and European interventions, paying attention to new developments and their implications for future foreign policy. I discuss the historical cases of Kosovo (1999) and Darfur (2004-present) to build a brief narrative of European interventionism, as compared to US interventionism. I then present survey and policy evidence to evaluate the outcomes of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) and any similar aspirations on

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the usage of force abroad. Lastly, I pose several questions related to the EU's current challenges against national populist movements.

European Security beyond the EU: The European Intervention Initiative

The European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is a military project between nine European countries, existing outside of both NATO and EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) frameworks. These nine EU member countries, including the United Kingdom (U.K), support the establishment of a European military force for rapid deployment during crises.[2] Unlike the EU, EI2 will remain extremely exclusive in its membership to maximize efficiency and political willingness. In fact, founding members expect to limit participation to a mere 14 or 15 countries. Germany is hesitant about such limitations, worrying about the effects to European unity and is pushing for greater inclusion (Billon-Galland and Quencez 2018).

EI2 will develop in a more concrete form this November following the ministerial meeting and Military European Strategic Talks (MEST) (Billon-Galland and Quencez 2018). For now, the most concrete objective of EI2 is to promote closer cooperation "between the armed forces of European states that are willing and able to carry out military missions and operations, throughout the spectrum of crises" (Billon-Galland and Quencez 2018). This cooperation would extend to intelligence sharing, scenario planning, and forums in which to discuss operational needs. As it stands, however, EI2 is not on its way to becoming a separate intervention force. In other words, France does not demand new military structures, but simply a flexible club of the countries that are both politically willing and militarily prepared to act during crises (Boffey 2018). Given such goals, EU membership remains secondary to functional capabilities.

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[2] The countries of France, Germany, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands, Estonia, Spain and Portugal signed a letter of intent in Luxembourg on June 2018. See Boffey (2018).

In the more distant future, this narrowly-mandated project should allow European national armed forces to organize and respond quickly to regional security problems. Consequently, the enterprise's future trajectory has already stirred both NATO and EU political communities. Mostly, these officials are worried about the duplication of security roles, the fragmentation of the EU identity, and the consequences to the transatlantic relationship (Billon-Galland and Quencez 2018; Boffey 2018). For instance, while Germany shares France's view on the EU's inability to wage urgent military responses, it prefers to reform structures within the Union, prioritizing inclusion over efficiency. This fear of disunion is felt more acutely as national government across EU countries fall prey to populist leadership. What if this new initiative promotes traditional notions of sovereignty and alliances over the patented EU supranational model?

The other dilemma lies in the competition for elite attention and political capital. As Boffey (2018) summarizes, "a successful implementation of the French initiative could distract the other EU countries from the EU format…If all goes well, all formats will be mutually reinforcing. If not, and the capable and the willing act outside EU frameworks, they risk devaluing the Union." Beyond this, a Europe with more unified military capabilities would be a way to break from the US security umbrella at a time when US commitments to its alliances are wavering. Let us be clear – in its current form, the European Intervention Initiative is not revolutionary. It poses low costs of entry and very few political risks, yet it serves as a suitable jumping point for the discussion of the past, present, and future of EU military missions.

Intervention by the Numbers

Military interventions abroad were once seen as outliers in typical patterns of interstate behavior. Over the past decades, however, the phenomenon has gained legitimacy as a regular

occurrence in international relations, especially driven by Western actors in the context of humanitarian and civil conflicts (Pickering and Mitchell 2017). Like the reformation in sovereignty represented by the very nature of the EU, many scholars have associated the consistency of foreign military intervention with the rise of ''contingent sovereignty,'' in which the norm of nonintervention in the internal affairs of countries is challenged (Ramos 2013, 143).

Since 2002, the EU has intervened over thirty times across three different continents ("EU in the World" 2018). Since 2007, it has had four multinational military "battle groups," but these troops have never deployed (Boffey 2018). In stark comparison, the US has undertaken military action as foreign policy over 400 times since the country's founding. Such missions have drastically increased in the last 50 years, with the US intervening over 230 times from 1950 to 2017. What's more, about 130 of these interventions have occurred after 1999 (Salazar Torreon 2017; Choi and James 2016).

Those comparative figures portray the US as leader of Western interventions, by a very wide margin. While the EU's smaller intervention record may often reflect benign trends, such as a primary reliance on diplomacy, economic statecraft, and normative power over the usage of force, it also reflects grave failures to respond. Founded on the protection of human rights and peace, the EU has failed to live up to these principles during times of violent crisis – both within and outside of its neighborhood. After its operational failures in the Balkans in the 1990s, the EU internalized its "lessons learned" and created the Common Security and Defense Policy, to back up its rhetoric on the responsibility to protect (R2P). However, when genocide broke out in Darfur in 2003, the EU once again failed to deploy any humanitarian military operation, let alone a swift, effective one. Unfortunately, coordination across member states remains just as difficult now as it was in 1990s, and the bureaucratic clutter is just as burdensome. Thus, the EU has not truly learned

its lessons from past humanitarian tragedies, since in times of genocide and ethnic cleansing, it is still unable to realistically muster *the option and threat* of military action.

Lessons Learned from the Kosovo Crisis

Despite its operational failings, the EU rightfully interpreted the outcomes of the Kosovo Crisis as a watershed moment that precipitated a common security policy. This lesson propelled the EU into multiple shared missions and framed discussions on the future of the region – thus, progress has surely not been elusive. As Joschka Fischer, the German Foreign Minister and Vice-Chancellor, said at the European Council meeting during the German presidency, "Unlike 1991/92, the EU pursued a common line in the Balkans this time, which can be explained by the fact that the European States had at last recognized that it was not just about moral duty or the future of a region on the periphery of Europe, but about their own security, indeed our collective security" (Fischer 1999). Most importantly, Fischer (1999) used the moment to expand the notions of the neighborhood, saying that "the Kosovo conflict has propagated two important ideas in the EU. *…South-Eastern Europe is now widely and unreservedly accepted as being part of Europe.*"

By the end of the Kosovo Crisis, Fischer (1999) summarized the EU lessons with an eye towards further security integration:

[The EU]...turned the crisis to good account as an incentive to achieve further integration. The reason for this is that the war in Kosovo served to highlight again that the essence of European integration is to establish a lasting framework for peace on our continent. This insight resulted in an awareness of the degree to which the national interests of individual Member States are interconnected, and in a readiness throughout Europe to take a decisive step forward in the historic task of bringing European integration to fruition.

But the militarization of the region was not the main objective in this case – it was about developing the institutions to preserve the liberal Western culture. The key lesson learned was that it was a European duty to integrate periphery neighbors and to ensure security, peace, and

democracy for the continent, even if it meant resorting to military force. Indeed, Fischer's (1999) statements from almost two decades ago echoed identical sentiments to the contemporary discussions on the European Intervention Initiative:

…this is not about militarization of the European Union at all, but about developing it into an effective force for peace which has the ability to act, and which is able, as in Kosovo, to uphold the power of justice and the renunciation of violence, thus ensuring that war as a political instrument in Europe is forever a thing of the past…This requires our determination to oppose those who seek to carry out nationalist policies through violence, murder, terror and expulsion, and when all other means fail, to resort to military means if necessary (Fischer 1999).

Back then, his colleagues concurred, especially regarding the importance of preserving Western civilization and the role of institutions in creating the ideal expanded neighborhood. HansGert Pottering (1999), a German conservative politician and later President of the European Parliament declared that, "Our message on the threshold of the year 2000 must be: never again are people in Europe to be driven from their homes, from their homeland. Human rights, human dignity, the right to a homeland are the foundation of our European civilization." This sounds like the normative Europe that is so often envisioned and confirmed in the transatlantic narrative.

No Protection for Darfur

Then what happened to this European responsibility when the violence in Darfur escalated to genocidal proportions by 2003? The EU, like all other powerful Western actors, pacified their responsibility to protect with economic sanctions, diplomatic gestures, and advisory roles. As Prunier (2005, 2008) observed, the world's most powerful countries limited themselves to merely expressing concern for Darfur and demanding vague United Nations (UN) action. In the case of US inaction, the lack of traditional national interests served as easy explanations, given standard

US foreign policy approaches. But for normative Europe, this non-intervention hit across shared values and legitimacy in image. Meanwhile, the UN, lacking the funding and military support of these powerful countries, relied on the African Union (AU) to deploy a token force without a real mandate to protect civilians.

Europe's non-intervention in Darfur showed how narrow those "lessons learned" truly were and how confined the common security policy was to the European neighborhood. We see hints of this exclusion in Europe's previous lessons learned, of course. Ivo Daalder (2000), then serving as director for European Affairs at the National Security Council, admitted this regarding Kosovo: "On the one hand lies integration in the rest of Europe at one fork of the road; at the other, is utter darkness." In other words, the lesson learned in Kosovo was to further integrate the European neighborhood and protects its member, not to extend these principles into the world at large. As it stands, the EU enforcement of human rights norms is highly biased by region, due to limitations in military structures and lack of political willingness. As Rieff (2011) so tragically summarized, "As a result, everywhere outside Western Europe and North America, R2P is losing what little ethical credibility it ever commanded."

This regional discrimination, unfortunately, often originates from the shared values of Western institutions, not from the cold indifference of geopolitical interests. These benign origins are what make the "limited lessons learned" harder to address. Put another way, we like what NATO and the EU can do for the Western sphere in times of crisis, and most audiences support the values that underpin the institutions. But how can we preserve the benefits of such regional norms and institutions while diminishing the inequalities that they may perpetuate across the globe? The first step may lie in bolstering institutions beyond the West. But in this endeavor, the

EU will have to face many of its internal paradoxes, and if it builds upon its joint military capabilities, it must resist the urge to rely on force as the primary method of policy-making, lest it loses its unique, hard-won advantages.

The European Way, a Powerful Paradox:

The EU has substantive power to shape what is normal, especially through its quest to overcome traditional sovereignty for the sake of other ideals, such as peace, democracy, rule of law, human rights, and social solidarity (Manners 2002). This makes the EU the absolute ideal leader on modern notions of humanitarianism and innovations in sovereignty. For instance, through contagion, the EU leads by "virtuous example" in spreading its integration project. It has also succeeded in procedural diffusion through its inter-regional dialogue with the Southern African Development Community since 1994, its membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the enlargement negotiations with southeastern European and Mediterranean countries. Such means of influence have proven effective, for example in the expansion of the death penalty abolitionist movement, which has attracted over 35 new converts (Manners 2002). These methods further help the EU pit its normative identity against the US sovereignty-obsessed identity in cases such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Kyoto Protocol. In these issues, the US is seen as lagging in its global duties, while the EU is the normative vanguard (Scheipers and Sicurelli 2007).

Moreover, the EU's conflict prevention machine and compliance monitoring, including its exporting capacity in civilian administration and rule of law, increase the success rates of Western nation-building projects. Also important is the EU's reputation as a civilian rather than a military power, making it the preferred international mediator. As Hastings (2009) declares, for the

Europeans, "multilateralism was preferred to unilateralism, pragmatism to ideology, root causes prioritized over symptoms, diplomacy over military force, the long term over the short term...caution preferred to risk" (14).

The EU is also not to be ruled out in terms of military capabilities. The world often forgets that the EU only appears militarily weak when compared to the US In fact, European NATO members spend as much on defense as Russia, China, and Japan combined (Ischinger, 2005). The key difference, however, relates to the EU's willingness to use military power. Former French President Chirac once declared that "War is always the admission of defeat, and is always the worst solution," and such a legacy defines the EU today (Hastings 2009, 11). As the Transatlantic Trends survey highlights, most people within Europe oppose the usage of force under any circumstance (Dempsey 2013).[3] Indeed, only 31 percent of those polled agreed that force is sometimes necessary to obtain justice, in stark contrast to the 68 percent of Americans who believe force is usually necessary to the promotion of justice.

Regarding humanitarian intervention in Syria, Europeans had an even louder response: 75 percent opposed any type of military action. But as Dempsey (2013) points out, this rejection also poses a contradiction to the EU cosmopolitan identity. This is because most Europeans still support a strong EU presence in international affairs. According to the survey, 71 percent of respondents said that strong European leadership in world affairs was desirable, down 5 percentage points from 2006. But such an aspiration for global influence becomes quite difficult to materialize if the threat of military force is never in the realm of options.

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[3] Transatlantic Trends interviewed respondents in ten European countries and Turkey. See here for more details: http://www.gmfus.org/publications/transatlantic-trends-2013.

But the European approach to security integration outside of EU frameworks demands great nuance and caution. The elites must frame the new initiatives as supplementing EU policies, not replacing them. They must encourage further methods of shared sovereignty instead of a return to simple national alliances, where the most powerful countries dominate and use force for direct geopolitical benefit. As Europe, the EU, and the US contend against forces of nationalism and right-wing populism, the need for unity under the banner of multilateralism and cosmopolitanism is desperate and dire.

After the Kosovo Crisis, the EU envisioned a shared military initiative like EI2, one that would be able to stem both internal crises and external threats to peace and security. At the other side of the spectrum, however, EU members were weary of relying on a militaristic approach to foreign policy, preferring economic and normative power instead. Unfortunately, such a foreign policy did not prevent the many violent crises that unfolded in the 2000s, both within and outside of the European neighborhood. At a time of transatlantic insecurity, the EU would be wise to dedicate more political will and resources to the new intervention initiative, if it can remember its core strengths – that unlike the US, it *refuses to lead* with force, that force is always an act of dire urgency and a last resort. Moreover, even with the usage of force as an option, the EU should emphasize its robust system of civilian conflict management, post-conflict rebuilding, and normative appeals as the first line of defense against all future crises.

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