

Book Review

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The EU and Military Operations: A comparative analysis

by Katarina Engberg

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In the ten years that the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has been fully operational, the military missions conducted under its aegis have received a tremendous amount of scholarly attention. Until recently however, the rich academic literature on the CSDP lacked systematic comparative studies that help to unravel the dynamics behind EU-led deployments. Katarina Engberg's book is one of the recent efforts to fill this substantive gap. It provides a comparative analysis of six EU-led military operations, along with three cases where such operations were considered but not deployed. The overall goal is to draw general conclusions about the conditions that determine whether a CSDP operation is launched. As Minister for Defence Affairs at the Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU during the mid-2000s, the author is very well-placed to achieve this goal. Her involvement in the decision-making processes on some of the operations under investigation provides the book with a wealth of empirical material.

An "Analytical Tool" is introduced in the beginning of the book to examine the cases systematically. This is partly inspired by the academic literature on the use of force and collective security, out of which two building blocks are derived. First of all, the interplay between political factors and military resources during the decision-making process on the use of force is emphasised. Secondly, the influence of local actors on this process is identified as an important factor. These general factors are further operationalised and supplemented by building on insights from techniques of defence planning and conclusions drawn from one of the main case studies, the Lebanon war of 2006. This results in a list of 15 indicators, which are expected to determine whether a crisis constitutes an appropriate opportunity for launching a CSDP operation.

A striking feature, and distinctive strength, of the analytical tool is the integration of some more practical factors; like access to appropriate command and control structures and the availability of necessary military resources for fulfilling the operation's mandate. The flipside of this strength is that several variables that are emphasised in the academic literature on the use of force are not taken into account. For example, the electoral considerations of political leaders, according to many studies of primary importance in decisions on the use of force, are not incorporated. In spite of this minor defect, the analytical tool encompasses a wide range of empirically relevant factors and provides the necessary structure for the case studies.

These case studies contain a wealth of empirical information on the decision-making process that precedes the launch of military operations under the CSDP. Some may find it disappointing, however, that the first three CSDP operations – Concordia (2003), Artemis (2003) and EUFOR Althea (2004) – are not discussed in depth. Unfortunately, the analytical tool was not even applied to operation Artemis, for which the author merely claimed that "all important factors would be marked as positive and driving" (p. 61).

The short length of the single chapter that describes these first three operations contrasts starkly with the three chapters on the two main case studies: the Lebanon war

and EUFOR Congo (2006). The discussion of how an EU-led operation did not materialise in the aftermath of the Lebanon war clearly demonstrates the relevance of some of the inhibiting factors incorporated in the analytical tool, like the importance of the availability of appropriate command structures and local support, which was not forthcoming because of the sceptical view of Hezbollah. These findings are strengthened by contrasting the decision-making process on a possible EU-led operation during the Lebanon war to the process that eventually led to an operation in Congo, where local parties were generally supportive of an EU-led deployment and Germany and France provided the necessary command and control structures. The two main cases also demonstrate the risk-adversity that characterises the CSDP: the author convincingly describes how the Lebanon war, with its high level of unregulated violence, would have constituted a much more challenging theatre than Congo, causing it not to be considered an appropriate opportunity for an EU-led operation.

After the discussion of the two main cases, two further chapters are devoted to other cases. The first compares the operation in Chad with the “non-case” of Eastern Congo in 2008. France’s position was particularly important for explaining the different outcome in these cases. While Paris was willing to provide the headquarters and the lion’s share of the forces for EUFOR Chad, it explicitly rejected a UN request for an operation in Eastern Congo. Again, some of the criteria of the analytical tool turned out to be relevant for understanding these divergent positions. The presence of Rwandan troops in Eastern Congo, for instance, partly explains French reluctance to support an operation, demonstrating the importance of local actors in decisions on the use of forces. The last empirical chapter covers several very recent cases. It discusses the maritime operation Atalanta (2009) and the most recent CSDP operation, EUTM Mali (2013). Like the first three operations, these are only very concisely described. Much more interesting is the empirically very rich section on the non-case of Libya 2011, in which the author discusses how the EU failed to launch an operation in Libya on three different occasions. Although additional inhibiting factors were identified in each one of them, it was intra-EU divisions that thwarted the launch of a CSDP operation throughout the crisis.

In the concluding chapter, the author highlights the empirical relevance of some of the criteria that were included in the analytical tool. By drawing on evidence from the case studies, the author convincingly demonstrates that the EU is more likely to launch an operation under the following conditions: i) when both its interests in the conflict and the tasks and risks of the operation are situated in the low to middle bandwidth; ii) individual European nations or the EU have intervened before in the theatre of operation; iii) other regional security providers support the operation; iv) influential local actors consent to an EU-led mission and appropriate command; v) and control structures are available. Unfortunately, the author only draws some general conclusions on the relevance of these criteria, but does not arrive at a parsimonious and integrated explanation for the pattern of EU-led military operations. Strikingly, none of the criteria of the analytical tool was eventually deemed unimportant. These defects could probably have been avoided by using a more stringent comparative research design and a more systematic data-analysis technique.

In spite of the minor defects mentioned above, this first book-length comparative study of the circumstances that drive and inhibit EU-led operations can be highly recommended to anyone interested in the EU’s military activity. Not only does it constitute one of the most empirically founded analyses of these operations, it also draws interesting general conclusions on the dynamics behind them. By discussing the non-cases of Lebanon 2006 and Libya 2011, the book provides new empirical material to augment academic debate on the CSDP and the practical experiences of the author induced her to pay the appropriate attention to the more practical factors that are more easily missed by full-time academics.
