

The Common Foreign & Security Policy

Europe in reality is a closed theatre where formidable battles are fought between the member states ...there are no common ideals and a common European destiny is inconceivable.

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By GRAHAM STEWART

Cold War diplomacy

Between 1949 and 1989, the historic rivalry between France and Germany was cast aside in a common western alliance governed by mutual fear of the Soviet Union. Cold War realities shaped the diplomatic outlook of the countries aligning themselves under the NATO umbrella. In consequence, the EEC was primarily concerned not with foreign affairs but with matters of trade and agricultural support. When in 1970 EEC members eventually agreed to a loose inter-governmental forum on foreign affairs called 'European Political Co-operation', it was little more than a tool of the Atlantic Alliance.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the defrosting of the Cold War returned international diplomacy to more fluid structures and thinking. Committed 'Europeans' sought to respond to this change by discarding their NATO mind-set. With the Atlantic Alliance suddenly deemed almost irrelevant, the European Community strove to define geopolitical interests of its own. In 1991, this aspiration was given legal force when the Maastricht Treaty gave birth to 'a common foreign and security policy' (CFSP) binding all EC (thereafter EU) member states.

Amsterdam: another try

In 1997, the Amsterdam Treaty amended and enhanced the scope of the CFSP. Revision of the Maastricht agreement was necessary first, because the CFSP had already proved inadequate to the problems on its doorstep (in particular Yugoslavia) and second, because the enlargement of the EU to include Austria, Finland and Sweden brought into the common foreign policy countries which were officially neutral. Since any CFSP joint action could only flow from the establishment of a common position for which unanimity was needed, the presence of these non-aligned countries could clearly jeopardise EU countries doing anything.

Amsterdam watered-down the block on introducing QMV. Henceforth, a 'joint action' could be pursued with a two-thirds majority. The minority were to be allowed to opt out of implementing a joint action, but were not allowed to pursue a contradictory independent policy. In this way it was hoped that the non-aligned members (or whoever) would not be capable of putting a spanner in the works every time the aligned members wished to act. There were other innovations. A permanent 'High Representative' was created (Javier Solana ended up being the

Maastricht creates a CFSP

In establishing the broad principles, Maastricht's CFSP was still inter-governmental in so far as no 'common position' could be established without the unanimous support of all EU members meeting in the European Council. However, where a common position was agreed, the details of its implementation could be decided by qualified majority voting (QMV). Where all members agreed to pursue a military strategy, the European arm of NATO, the Western European Union (WEU), was the organisation through which action would be implemented.

In an arrangement known as the 'troika', the international diplomacy of the CFSP was directed by the EU member state holding the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (a post that rotates every six months) assisted by the previous and subsequent holder of the Presidency. The Commission was intimately involved too, setting the agenda as well as co-ordinating and Drafting proposals

.CFSP fails Yugoslavia

The CFSP established by Maastricht immediately proved itself inadequate in dealing with the crisis in Yugoslavia. EU diplomacy worked on the assumption that problems could be solved by tinkering with the structure of the Yugoslav federation, rather than seeing the federation itself as the source of the problem. The EU's refusal to recognise the secession from the federation of Croatia (despite the fact that this was the will of 92 per cent of the vote in Croatia's referendum) led Germany to threaten to recognise Croatia unilaterally. Unwilling to break ranks from a determined Germany which was prepared to smash the very CFSP it had advocated so strongly if it did not get its own way, the rest of the EU caved in and followed Bonn's lead. Months of fruitless EU diplomacy followed, including support for an arms embargo which

choice) charged with giving the CFSP a full-time and continuous director, a post which the old 'troika' system had been unable to provide. Amsterdam also set in motion the decision taken in 1999 to sideline the WEU, its framework effectively passing to the institutions of the EU. Thus the CFSP had supposedly come of age, just as its members again relied on the firepower of the United States over the skies of Kosovo to do its dirty work.

Will it work?

Indeed, the firepower of the United States remains the principal support for the European Union's pretensions to world-power status. Most of the larger questions regarding the CJTF remain unresolved in the event of the EU using it to fight military engagements in the name of the CFSP. How sophisticated will the materiel be that the US allows Europeans to use and potentially lose? Will the US allow its materiel to be used if it disapproves of the EU's policy? If the US has the effective right of veto, will its critics not claim it has hit upon a concept whereby it can pursue its own foreign policy whilst only risking European blood in its prosecution? How entangled will the EU become in other countries' affairs before discovering that the US will withhold consent to use its materiel, forcing the EU either into a humiliating withdrawal, or a humiliating military disaster? These questions alone demonstrate the weaknesses underlying any attempt by the EU to indulge in big stick diplomacy.

Flawed theory, bad practice

The case for the CFSP rests on the assumption that all EU members have, or ought to have, the same international interests and outlooks, and that therefore they can act more effectively by acting as one.

This is clearly nonsense since the EU's members have, and are likely to continue to

threatened the ability of the Croats and Bosnians to defend themselves and for UN 'safe areas' which were anything but. Eventually, Washington found itself having to take the lead, brokering an alliance between the Croats and the Bosnian Muslims and indirectly assisting the Croat offensive which pushed the Serbs back (a policy which the EU mediator, Carl Bildt, declared was a 'war crime'). In 1995 a cease-fire was agreed and under the terms of the Dayton Accord, a multi-national force (which was disproportionately American) occupied Bosnia in order to keep the peace. So much for 'the hour of Europe'.

A free lunch?

The CFSP was always going to be toothless without the arms to back it up. EU members wanted to have the benefit of American firepower without having to pay the unsustainable cost of developing it for themselves. This circle was squared by the concept of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF). Washington agreed to put the USA's NATO-assigned materiel and logistical support at the disposal of CFSP actions. Thus, theoretically, the EU would be able to fight a modern technology-based war with borrowed technology. At the same time the Europeans looked at ways in which they could redeploy their existing defence spending more efficiently. The major EU arms manufacturing nations started forming themselves into embryonic pan-European collectives to co-ordinate and integrate weapon procurement and production. Although the intention was to avoid wasteful duplication, the effort so far seems to have produced hugely expensive projects, based upon compromises, which have, at best, a limited market and represent a poor investment for the European taxpayer.

have, widely divergent international interests and priorities. Some have post-Imperial ties, some are non-aligned, some have enormous international investments in particular geographic areas, some have virtually none. These conflicts make reaching a common position possible only by phrasing it in such broad terms as to be virtually worthless, or as Phillipe de Saint-Robert has put it 'Europe can only speak with a single voice to say nothing at all'. Thus, individually, European countries end up having less say in shaping or reacting to international events, not more.

What this means in practice may be glimpsed by questioning whether France and the United Kingdom would have been able to participate effectively in the American-led liberation of Kuwait had the current rules of CFSP existed at that time. In binding its members to the line of the European Union's common lowest denominator, the CFSP would probably have prevented a full-hearted contribution. As it was, Belgium refused to sell Britain ammunition for the venture and this was before the non-aligned countries had even been admitted to the process. Few examples better illustrate how the logic of the CFSP potentially undermines the entitlement of the United Kingdom to act in the interests of itself and its friends. The CFSP is not so much a propeller as an anchor. As such, it is entirely unsuited to the fast moving world of modern international diplomacy.