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The European Union in Global Security: The Politics of Impact

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As of June 1, 2015, the European Union has deployed eleven civilian missions and five military operations across the African continent, Europe, and the Middle East, all of them under the normative umbrella of the Common Security and Defence Policy. Even though the EU is still “inactive, underutilized, under-resourced, or absent” in some regions, it is not less true that over the past decade the EU has become a niche international security contributor and has the potential to grow into a global security provider. It is precisely the main thesis of *The European Union in Global Security: The Politics of Impact*, by professors R. H. Ginsberg (Skidmore College, USA) and S. E. Penska (Westmont College, USA).

The book can be divided into four blocks and a postscript. After the foreword by Javier Solana —the first EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (1999-2009)— and the review of the literature in the introduction, Chapter 1 firstly contextualizes CSDP operations from the historical, theoretical and evaluative perspectives. Secondly, the authors present two main analytical tools: a decision-making model to situate the CSDP within the map of the overall EU foreign policy, and an innovative scheme which combines three theoretical perspectives —neorealism, rational choice institutionalism and social constructivism— with multiple levels of analysis to explain why CSDP operations are launched.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the operationalization of the CSDP missions lifecycle to measure their internal and external impact, that is to say, the effects of these operations on the EU external action institutional architecture as well as on the host countries and societies. In particular, Chapter 2 starts exploring the four basic aspects of the EU crisis management system —mission catalyst, mission mandate, mission launch, and mission evaluation— and finishes by highlighting some controversial issues. Such is the case, for instance, of the “missions deployed without policies” (p. 63). After that, Chapter 3 provides a taxonomy to analyze the CSDP outcomes based on its functional, political, social and temporal dimensions, and shows the need to standardize the unintended significances of the operations as a part of their reporting and assessing criteria.

Chapter 4 is the largest part of the book. It exhaustively demonstrates the degree of strategic impact of the EU in the global security governance. With this guiding thread, Ginsberg and Penska scrutinize the influence —from both cognitive and empirical perspectives— of CSDP operations on the EU Member States as well as on other multilateral security providers such as the UN, NATO, and the African Union. In addition, they study the perceptions from the U.S. and Russia about the growing role of the EU in the international security affairs.

Before closing the manuscript with a reflection on the future prospects and main challenges of the EU crisis management system —e.g. the importance of generate a strategic culture, Chapter 5 reconstructs the CSDP from the two main variables which dominate the analytical approach throughout the book: institutional learning and international learning. While the former occurs when “the union and its members analyze the effects of action in order to make future improvements”, the latter refers “to how (or whether) the non-EU world comes to accept the union as a part of global security governance” (p. 40).



Both conceptual axes arise as the main reference of an outstanding academic work whose main value resides in the operationalization of the EU Foreign Policy in general, and the Common Security and Defence Policy in particular. On the one hand, this book is the result of a research effort that unquestionably achieves the aim of providing the theoretical basis needed for an in-depth evaluation of CSDP operations, unlike other more descriptive and prescriptive papers usually from think tanks. On the other hand, the framework provided by the authors, based on a comprehensive taxonomy and methodology for measuring the effects of such missions, enables researchers and analysts to carry out comparative analysis. Moreover, it allows them to dive inside the “black box” of the EU external action, which is depicted as a feedback model dependent on the internal and external contexts.

Another significant strength of this volume is that it constitutes an independent exercise conducted by American scholars outside the European institutions. Thus, it moves away from traditional biases which always tend to portray CSDP missions successfully, whereas the research incorporates a high percentage of interviews with principals and agents in the field from both the EU crisis management component and the Member States. In addition, both the didactic nature of the book—somewhat repetitive considering the cyclical replication of the main ideas and concepts—and the wide-ranging set of recommendations provided by the authors, make of it a useful reference guide not only for scholars but also for EU officials and decision-makers.

Indeed, the most recent conclusions of the Council of the European Union on CSDP are aligned with the main thesis of this work: “the EU and its Member States are assuming increased responsibilities to act as a security provider [and] enhancing their own security and their global strategic role”. The Council has also underlined the importance of cooperating with its partners, especially the UN, NATO, OSCE, African Union, League of Arab States and ASEAN, which can be seen as an unambiguous evidence of international learning. Regarding institutional learning, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs have emphasized the need of a “more efficient crisis management structures within the EEAS”, among many other recommendations. Besides, a new Commissioner’s Group on External Action was created in November 11, 2014.

It remains clear that the EU Foreign Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy are both “works in progress”—as Ginsberg and Penska point out. The EU leadership appointed in 2014 seems to understand that facing the current strategic context, marked by instability, requires to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of CSDP. But it also demands analytical models and measuring tools to evaluate its internal and external impact, such as those provided in this comprehensive, well-structured and innovative contribution.

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