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**THE ECONOMIC AND MILITARY FACES OF EU
INTERVENTIONISM: BALANCING HUMANITARIAN GOALS
AND SOVEREIGN INTERESTS**

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Abstract: The study discusses the EU's role as an international actor and its increasing focus on security and defense, acknowledging the Union's origins in economic agreements while underscoring the growing importance of ensuring citizen security. Through the lens of recent EU missions and operations, the research illustrates how European interventionism is manifesting within a tightly regulated yet potentially restrictive framework. Notably, the EU's trajectory of interventionism appears to be the inverse of traditional models, gradually transitioning from 'soft' diplomatic and economic measures to embracing the 'hard' aspects of military engagement. The article concludes that the EU's interventionism, while still adhering to value-based principles, is increasingly influenced by pragmatic considerations, including commercial interests, counter-terrorism, and border security. This shift represents a significant evolution in the EU's approach, reflecting a complex blend of humanitarian concerns and strategic interests that define its role on the global stage.

Key words: Interventionism, Security Strategy, Strategic Autonomy, EU Missions, Soft Power, Hard Power, Economic Tactics, Military Engagement, Interoperability, NATO Complementarity, Humanitarian Principles.

1. Context

The military interventions over the past decades have gained notoriety as a regular event in international relations, particularly those conducted by Western actors in the context of humanitarian and civil conflicts.[1] As a revision of the concept of sovereignty represented by the very existence of the EU, many researchers have associated the coherence of foreign military intervention with the emergence of "contingent sovereignty," where the norm of non-intervention in the internal affairs of countries is contested.[2] Since 2002, the EU has intervened over thirty times on three different continents. Since 2007, it has had four multinational military "battle groups," but these troops have never been deployed.[3] The EU's record in terms of minimal interventionism often reflects benign trends, such as reliance on diplomacy, economic arrangements, and the normative exercise of power over the use of force. At the same time, it reflects serious failures in response in cases of international interventions.

Based on the foundation of protecting human rights and peace, the EU has failed to conform to these principles in periods of violent crisis - both within and outside its neighborhood. Following its operational failures in the Balkans in the 1990s,[4] the EU internalized the lessons learned and created the Common Security and Defence Policy, to support its rhetoric on the "responsibility to protect" (R2P). However, in 2003, when the genocide in Darfur broke out, the EU again failed to deploy a humanitarian military operation, let alone a rapid and effective one. Coordination among member states remains as difficult now as it was in the 1990s. The European Union has evolved and changed its mode of justification, from values to justifications based on pragmatism, while military operations have become more numerous and have permeated the image of European foreign policy.

The decision-making process regarding the EU's military operations has become increasingly institutionalized, especially visible in how their initiation has been incorporated within the



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framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). At the same time, we observe that the EU remains quite selective as a military actor in the missions it undertakes and has a strong preference for missions with relatively low levels of military involvement. Also, although the early missions were generally motivated by value and principle-based concerns, such as human security, this has changed over time.

In 2003, the EU launched its first military operation: Operation Concordia in FYR Macedonia. Since then, the Union has undertaken a total of 12 military operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Following the failure of the European Defence Community in the 1950s, the absence of military means came to be celebrated as an advantage and not as a sign of EU weakness. Labels like civil power [5] and normative power [6] not only characterized EU power but also had a prescriptive purpose. For example, they were enthusiastically endorsed by key EU representatives, such as the Commission President, Barroso: "We are one of the most important, if not the most important, normative powers in the world". [7]

Therefore, the launch of EU military operations triggered an active academic debate regarding the role of the military instrument in defining the Union's character. Smith argued that a normative power identity is inherently incompatible with the use of military means, as any military intervention is bound to change the logic of foreign policy decision-making and will compromise normative standards. [8]

However, most analysts have argued instead that military means could serve to reinforce the EU's normative power, as it added an essential instrument for promoting EU values globally. [9]

Others have again suggested that the EU was never a true normative power and that engaging military means would allow the Union to engage in international power behaviour. [10]

2.From Planning to Action: The EU's Intervention Mechanism Unveiled

The European Union has deployed a series of missions and crisis management operations, both civil and military, across three continents - Europe, Africa, Asia - framed within the Common Security and Defence Policy, the operational component of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The Saint Malo Declaration of December 4, 1998, stated that the European Union must be in a position "to play its full role on the international stage". [11] For this reason, it needed "the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and the readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises". [12] This shaped the concept of crisis management in the European Union.

A significant step was made through the Treaty of Lisbon, which supports the increase in the capacity for independent action, deciding a series of changes, including the creation, within the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), of an Operations Centre, acting as a command for its own missions, and allowing the use of member states' command centers for certain missions at a given time.

Currently, the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) operates under the guidance of the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and under the authority of the High Representative/Vice President



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(HR/VP) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The EUMS is responsible for the planning and execution of all military missions at the military-strategic level. The EUMS consists of five directions:

1. Concepts and Capabilities;
2. Intelligence;
3. Operations;
4. Logistics;
5. Communications and Information Systems.

Athena is a mechanism responsible for financing the common costs associated with the EU's military operations within the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

The decision to deploy forces and the command and control structure for an EU mission is taken by the member states in the Council of Foreign Affairs.

3. An Overview of the European Union's Interventions

Up to this point, the European Union has a history of 37 missions, both civil and military, in 21 states and in the Mediterranean Sea.

In 2003, the EU launched two military operations in the Balkans: Concordia in FYR Macedonia and Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A year later, the EU initiated Operation Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina, taking over a previous NATO operation. All these three missions were justified based on values, even though their focus differed. The missions in the former Yugoslav republics aimed to maintain peace agreements, the Ohrid framework agreement in the case of Concordia, [13] and the Dayton agreement for Althea [14]. In the case of Artemis, the value-based justification of its goals is clear: the EU will deploy a temporary emergency force [to] contribute to the stabilization of the humanitarian and security situation in the town of Bunia, D.R. Congo, including (...) for the protection of the civilian population. [15]

In 2006, the EU's second military operation in the D.R. Congo (EUFOR RD Congo) aimed to oversee and manage the peaceful conduct of democratic elections [16]. Similarly, EUFOR Chad and the Central African Republic aimed to "improve the security of refugees and internally displaced persons, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, and create favorable conditions for reconstruction and development efforts." [17] These objectives explicitly invoke the humanitarian values of peace, safety, and human security.

The first five military missions of the EU fulfilled clear objectives based on values: implementing peace agreements and protecting civilians and refugees.

Operations after 2008 include EUNAVFOR Atalanta (from 2008), EUTM Somalia (from 2010), EUTM Mali (from 2013), three successive operations in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA 2014-2015, EUMAM RCA 2015-2016, EUTM RCA from 2016), and EUNAVFOR Med (from 2015).

Until 2013, these were supported under the umbrella of the notion of a "comprehensive/global approach." [18] At the same time, however, we observe a notable shift in the justification of these more recent operations, as they include some considerations that fall within the



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realm of pragmatism. This certainly applies to EUNAVFOR Atalanta, the EU's first maritime operation. The initial mandate of Atalanta involved the value-based objective: "to protect vessels of the WFP (World Food Programme - UN World Food Programme) delivering food aid to displaced persons in Somalia, in accordance with the mandate provided in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1814, from 2008." [19] However, the mandate added, to this task, the broader objective of protecting commercial shipping routes off the Somali coast against piracy and armed robbery. Thus, with Atalanta, the EU explicitly recognized its own economic interests for the first time in an operation. [20]

However, it has been shown that protecting commercial routes is not just an instrument of the World Food Programme. [21] It turned out that one or two EU frigates are used for the protection of WFP and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), while six other frigates are deployed to protect commercial ships. [22]

In 2010, a military training mission (EUTM Somalia) was launched with the aim of contributing to the strengthening of the Somali Federal Transitional Government (TFG) as a functional government serving the Somali citizens; (...) a comprehensive and sustainable perspective for the development of Somalia's security sector (...). [23]

Clearly, this statement appeals to the principle of human security - focusing on security sector reform aimed at protecting Somali citizens.

Exceeding the CSDP framework, EUNAVFOR Atalanta contributed to the launch of the Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, launched in 2011, which underpinned the operation's mandate from 2012. [24] This framework recognized that the main causes of piracy cannot be resolved through the military instrument, and this was institutionally translated into the position of an EU special representative, who was tasked with coordinating all political instruments. [25] Thus, while the military initiative initially marked the EU's involvement in Somalia, the launch of the strategic framework marks the transition from "piracy first" to a "Somalia first" policy [26]. However, the regional strategy focuses on security-oriented measures rather than poverty reduction [27]. Another theater of operations where EU military personnel have been active is Mali, with EUTM Mali launched in 2013. Again, we find that in justifying this operation, pragmatism-based considerations play an important role alongside value-based concerns. The central purpose of the operation was formulated as "restoring the territorial integrity of Mali and reducing the threat posed by terrorist groups." [28] However, in a background note, the European External Action Service highlights threats to the EU's own strategic interests. Thus, while the focus is primarily on Malian territory and its integrity, the referred threat also concerns the security of the EU.

In 2014, the EU launched EUFOR RCA, aimed at providing a secure environment in the capital of the Central African Republic, Bangui, in support of the African Union mission. [29] The EU took responsibility for the international airport, which offered refuge for tens of thousands of displaced people and served as an entry point for humanitarian deliveries. [30] In early 2015, the military operation was replaced by the EUMAM RCA military advisory mission, to support preparations for security sector reform (EU Council 2015b). After a year and a half, this operation was followed by an EU military training mission, EUTM RCA, which aims to modernize the armed forces of the Central African Republic, transforming them into structures "efficient and responsible



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in a democratic spirit." [31] Thus, the justification of all these three missions relied heavily on values and principles, particularly including training and education missions.

The most recent EU military mission is EUNAVFOR Med Sophia. This operation is quite distinctive in how it is justified exclusively with reference to the EU's own security interests. While the international legal obligation of "search and rescue (SAR)" is acknowledged, the main objective of EUNAVFOR Med is the identification, capture, and disposal of vessels and assets used or suspected of being used by smugglers or traffickers.

The mandate's expansion in June 2016 added two secondary tasks: strengthening the capacity and training of the Libyan coast guard, and contributing to the UN-imposed arms embargo. [32] EUNAVFOR Med was primarily motivated by the EU's internal concerns, which is also reflected in the unprecedented role played by the Commission in initiating the operation. [33] EUNAVFOR Med was well integrated into the EU institutions' overall approach to sea-crossing immigrants.

Military operations are an integral part of a broader EU foreign policy strategy, such as the Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, in the case of Atalanta and EUTM Somalia, and the Sahel Strategy, in the case of EUTM Mali. At the same time, in the period after 2008, we observe a shift in the justification strategies used, as there are increasingly more considerations based on a pragmatic vision: EU commercial interests in the Somali cases, EU security interests in the case of Mali, and border security in the case of EUNAVFOR Med.

Regarding the logic of justification, we find that most EU military missions have been value-based. Certainly, in launching its initial missions, the EU emphasized the humanitarian concerns at stake. Typically, such operations aimed to support the implementation of peace agreements or democratic elections. However, in the last ten years - in operations like EUNAVFOR Atalanta, EUTM Mali, and EUNAVFOR Med Sophia - we find that pragmatic concerns such as commercial interests, counter-terrorism, and border control have become increasingly important.

Over the past decade, while justifications referencing values and principles are appropriately acknowledged, considerations from the realm of pragmatism have become more significant in how the EU justifies its military involvement.

4. Conclusion

Analyzing the European effervescence in the field of security and defense, with a new security strategy after more than ten years, deeper cooperation mechanisms in the defense area, advanced discussions about complementarity with NATO, and the introduction of the concept of strategic autonomy, Europe is moving towards a defense union.

There are no premises for a European army with exclusive forces; rather, through very well-defined cooperation tools, working methods, deepened interoperability, and standardization, a Europe is emerging that could defend itself more effectively against new and future threats.

Practically, all these steps indicate a reactive behavior, with the EU being pushed along this path due to changes in the security environment. The relevance of the European Union, as an actor on the international stage, is also measured by its ability to ensure the security of its citizens, even though the European project started from economic agreements.



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The emergence of these debates at the European level creates a new approach that the EU gives to defense and the projection of stability in its neighborhood. We can still ask whether this could lead to the EU's involvement with national armed forces in international missions, representing the European Union as an entity, and not the national states, based on the responsibility to protect or having another set of norms and mechanisms behind. It is certain that there is an evolution towards a commitment in the field of security and defense at the level of the European Union.

From the perspective of this research in the case of the European Union, a logical evolutionary thread can be traced, outlining a new type of interventionism, starting from one based on diplomacy, the use of norms and economic constraints, and moving towards one that includes the military domain.

It is interesting to note that, in the case of the EU, the process is likely to be reversed, starting from the "soft" to reach the "hard" part of interventionism, while with other actors, the military instrument is first identified, to which other "soft" or "hybrid" tools are added.

So far, analyzing European missions in the world, international interventions are manifested through a very well-regulated, but also limiting framework.

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