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**The Limits of European Foreign and Security Policy:
A Comparison between the EU Iraq and Iran Policies**

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Introduction

Before 2003, both Iraq and Iran confronted the European Union with two comparable foreign policy challenges: alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programmes in the Middle East, one of the most volatile regions in the world, and a belligerent attitude by the US administration towards both countries. However, despite the similarities, EU policies have developed very differently in the two cases: During the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis, EU policies were dominated by empty declarations based on the smallest common denominator between the EU Member States, whereas in Iran the Union has become an influential independent actor. How is it possible to explain these radically different policy outcomes in similar circumstances? Why can the EU be in one case a fairly coherent international actor in its own right, whereas in the other it is merely a deeply divided international organization?

Although in recent years both the Iraq and the Iran case have featured prominently in studies of European foreign and security policies, the literature deals generally only with one of the two cases. For example, the EU's lack of consensus in 2002 and 2003 regarding the US-led invasion of Iraq – one of the most prominent international crises in years – has provoked numerous studies on its causes and consequences (Crowe 2003; Grigorescu 2008; Hill 2004; Menon 2004; Ortega 2002; Puetter and Wiener 2007). Likewise, the EU's diplomatic activity after the

discovery of clandestine nuclear activity in Iran in 2002-2003 has led to an impressive number of publications on the form and the strengths and weaknesses of the European approach towards Iran (Denza 2005; Dryburgh 2008; Everts 2004; Harnisch 2007; Kile 2005a; Kupchan 2006; Leonard 2005; Posch 2006; Sauer 2007, 2008). Yet, even though both the Iraq and Iran crises occurred roughly around the same time, few direct comparisons between the EU Iraq and Iran policies exist.¹ A few pundits highlight that Iran has become a prominent “test” for the viability of a common European foreign and security policy after the EU’s failure in Iraq (Everts 2004; Kile 2005b; Kupchan 2006; Leonard 2005; Quille and Keane 2005), but they do not compare EU Iraq and Iran policies. One expert even warns that “...analogies with the Iraq crisis can be misleading” (Everts 2004: 3)

However, a comparison between successful and failed attempts of European foreign policy output allows highlighting the limits within which the EU can find consensus and carry out forceful policies – as in Iran – and the cases in which the Union is likely to fail as an independent actor – as in Iraq.² On a more general level, it shows how the EU has turned into an extremely hybrid force in international politics: Depending on the issue at stake, it is either a power to be reckoned with or a negligible paper tiger. The paper argues that the traditional way to explain such a phenomenon, i.e. to analyze all the competing national interests of Member States and how they can be reconciled at the European level, is not convincing, even though foreign and security policies belong to the realm of intergovernmentalism. Rather, it argues that significant foreign policy outputs by the EU require consensus between its Member States in only three key areas: (a) the perception of security; (b) the principal means, e.g. persuasion, coercion or force; and (c) the relation with the major actor in the international system, the United States. In other words, the EU has to find a common denominator in a very limited number of areas. This makes consensus much more likely, but leaves also room for substantial dissonance.

The structure of the paper is basically twofold: First, I will provide a general conceptual framework on how consensus can or cannot be achieved in the framework of European foreign and security policy. By examining more in detail the argument presented above, the first chapter provides the necessary basis for the empirical study of the EU Iraq and Iran policies in the

¹ For a game-theoretic approach, see Andreas Goldthau, "Divided over Iraq, United over Iran, A Rational Choice Explanation to European Irrationalities," *European Political Economy Review* 8.Spring (2008)40-67.

² The paper distinguishes between ‘outputs’ and ‘outcomes.’ The former refers to the establishment of policies and policy actions, whereas the latter concerns the results of these policies and policy actions. As the Iran case shows, strong output does not necessarily lead to strong outcomes.

following chapter. Secondly, I will analyze empirically to which degree the European Union is able to find actually consensus in the case of Iraq and Iran. That is, it analyzes where the EU can develop and implement effective policies and when foreign and security policies end up easily in a cul-de-sac. In order to achieve this objective, the paper will scrutinize in detail how European security perceptions have developed since 2001 in both Iraq and Iran, the means that have been applied successively and the impact of US policies. Finally, I will outline in the conclusions the limits of European foreign and security policy.

I. Consensus and EU Foreign Policy Output

Generally, the EU deals with international problems such as the alleged Iraqi and Iranian WMD programmes in the context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the EU's so-called second pillar. Institutionally, this means that all decisions have to be taken by consensus. In other words, each Member State has virtually a veto power over the decisions taken by the EU. Consequently, sceptics argue that the clashing national interests of 15 (and after 2004/2007 of 25/27) Member States make it extremely difficult to find consensus in the framework of CFSP, especially regarding issues of 'high politics' that belong to the fiercely guarded nucleus of national foreign and security policies (Gordon 1997/98). As Stanley Hoffmann argued some years ago, "...a Europe of 20 or 25 members is going to find it even more difficult than a Europe of 15 nations to agree on a common diplomacy and defence" (Hoffmann 2000: 196). In other words, conflicting national interests prevent substantial foreign policy output at the European level. At the same time, the argument goes, the EU lacks the institutional mechanisms and foreign policy capabilities, e.g. an own diplomatic service, a European army or a common intelligence service, to act forcefully in international affairs (Hill 1993; Hoffmann 2000). However, there is a fundamental flaw in the argument of the sceptics: Whereas clashing national interests and the lack of capabilities may help explaining why the EU is incapable to produce substantial outputs during the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis, it leaves little room to explain the substantial output that actually exists in the case of Iran or other areas of 'high politics.' How is it possible that the then 15 Member States did reach consensus during the early stages of the Iranian nuclear crisis but failed to do so during the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis? And why did the EU

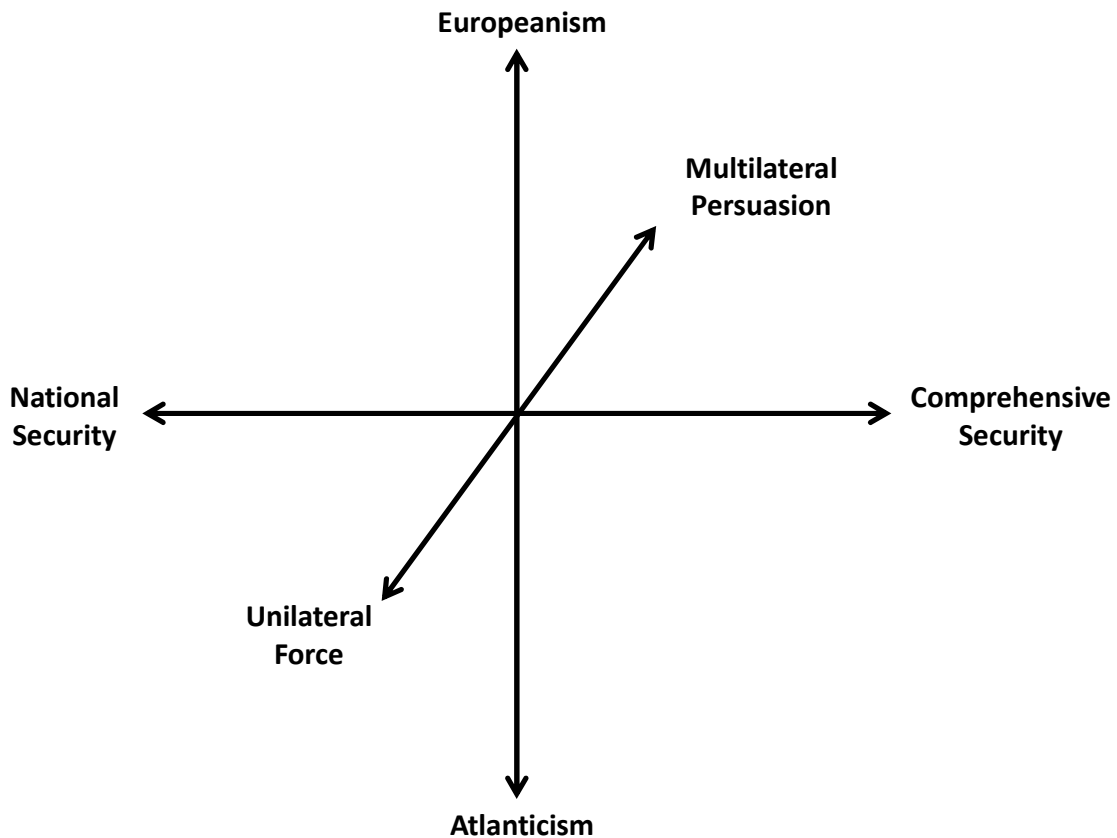
have sufficient capabilities to act in the case of Iran but not Iraq? The conclusion must be that the EU has capabilities to act forcefully in international affairs and its actions are not necessarily blocked by clashing national interests of its Member States. But how is it possible then to explain the varying degrees of European foreign policy output in similar circumstances?

Even though the EU has established numerous common foreign policy institutions – from the High Representative for the CFSP to the Political and Security Committee – it is certainly not possible to discuss away the essentially intergovernmental institutional architecture of the CFSP. However, it is not convincing either to see the EU as a place where 15 and now 27 competing national interests have to be reconciled to be able to produce common foreign policy output. In fact, 15 to 27 individual national interests in a strict sense would make it virtually impossible to find consistently consensus for common foreign policy action. The paper argues, therefore, that it is not necessary to find consensus among all the national interests of the states that form the EU to get common foreign policy outputs. Consensus is only necessary in three recurring key areas regarding foreign and security policy in general: security perception, use of means and transatlantic relations.

As the figure below shows, each area can be imagined as an axis along which different positions exist: The x-axis shows how security can be perceived in a given international crisis; the y-axis represents the use of different means; and the z-axis represents the distinct relations with the only superpower in the international system, the United States. Furthermore, each axis has two ends of opposing extreme positions: The x-axis lies between two ideal-types of security perception: on the one hand, national security in the classical sense of narrowly defined interests in the increase of the power status of a nation state and, on the other hand, a comprehensive security concept that is concerned with absolute gains and, in particular, human security, defined by the Barcelona Report as “individual freedom from basic insecurities” (Study Group on Europe’s Security Capabilities 2006: 330). In practice, most of the time the actual security perception lies somewhere between the two extremes. Yet, the underlying security concept is particularly important for which kind of goals and measures are implemented in a certain international crisis. The ends of the y-axis show the two most radical forms of measures that can be taken: unilateral military force by a nation state and multilateral persuasion. Between these two sets of measures different types of actions are thinkable, e.g. coercive measures such as sanctions or conditionality. The z-axis, finally, displays the degree of transatlantic relation Member States

want to pursue: At one end, there are the Atlanticists that prefer bandwagoning whereas at the other end, radical Europeanists try to counterbalance America’s power in the world. Once more, many intermediate forms of transatlantic relationships are possible along this axis.

Figure 1: Key axes along which European foreign policy decisions are taken



Source: Author’s own elaboration.

x-axis: security perception
y-axis: use of means
z-axis: transatlantic relations

It is assumed that within the EU Member States there exist tendencies towards all six extremes.³ The more certain Member States push their policy positions towards one of the extremes the unlikelier it is that consensus can be found. On the contrary, the more they are willing to move towards the centre, the more compromise is likely. If the three axes are put into a three-

³ The question when and why the foreign policies of certain Member States tend towards one or another extreme is bracketed here, as it is not significant for the argument.

dimensional chart, the point where all three axes meet would be the ideal-type consensus that would allow permanent foreign policy output (see figure). In practice, however, the EU and its Member States have to react to constantly changing foreign policy challenges. Thus, new consensus has to be found permanently. Depending on the issue at stake the consensus can move to a certain extent towards one or another extreme. However, if some Member States push too much towards one of the extremes or towards opposing extremes simultaneously, the result will be dissonance among EU Member States and, thus, the failure to produce significant foreign policy output.

Usually, nation states possess powerful institutional mechanisms to deal with conflicts in the three key foreign policy areas, mainly through the authority of the government. For instance, trench wars between the US State and Defense Departments about objectives and adequate measures in foreign and security affairs are quite frequent, but the White House has the competence to resolve the conflicts by deciding ultimately about ends and means. In the EU, the institutional mechanisms to deal with competing positions in the three key foreign policy areas are not as mature as in nation states, in particular the authority of a government is missing, but they exist: First, during the last 15 years the EU has established numerous institutions and (informal) rules that facilitate increased cooperation among Member States. In the words of Michael E. Smith, “In general, the EU foreign policy system is oriented towards consensus-building, problem-solving and the creation of common understandings, interests or reference points, which then form the basis for common positions or joint actions” (Smith 2004: 107). Secondly, as the *directoire* literature demonstrates, in many occasions a limited number of Member States have taken up a leadership role during international crises. This allows to certain degree the imposition of the foreign policy positions of the leading Member States (Gegout 2002; Hill 2006). Thirdly, EU Member States have developed a general political will to cooperate, as exemplified by the often used term ‘coordination reflex.’ In a nutshell, institutionalization, leadership and political will have created such a profound integration of the EU’s different actors that in principle they are able to find at least short-term resolutions of their conflicts in the merely three key areas mentioned before. Thus, frequent common foreign policy output is possible, but also occasional dissonance.

II. Consensus and Dissonance in the EU Iraq and Iran Policies

The similarities between the Iraq crisis and the Iranian nuclear crisis are striking:⁴ Both occurred roughly around the same time (2002-2003) in the same geopolitical region (the Middle East), concerned the same problem (alleged WMD programmes by non-democratic states) and included US policies based on regime change. However, as the EU policy output was substantially different in the two cases, there must have been important differences. It is argued that they can be found along the axes described in the previous chapter.

Security Perception

The key issue in both the Iraq and Iran crisis is the development of clandestine WMD programmes. Since there exists a strong consensus among most states that the horizontal proliferation of WMD⁵ is actually highly undesirable,⁶ all EU Member States agree that it has been necessary to prevent Iraq and Iran from developing own WMD capabilities. In both cases, suspicions about hidden WMD programmes can be traced back to the 1980s, though Iraq was originally the larger concern, as Allied Forces discovered clandestine Iraqi WMD programmes in the wake of the 1990-1991 Gulf War. But concerns about Iran developing WMD are hardly new either (Bowen and Kidd 2004). Already in the early 1990s Members of the European Parliament discussed with Council and Commission representatives the danger of the alleged acquisition of WMD by Iran (*Debates of the European Parliament* 1993). In 2001, well before the discovery of concrete evidence of a hidden Iranian nuclear programme, the Commission even talked in an astonishingly blunt way about “Iran’s intention to develop weapons of mass destruction...” (Commission of the European Communities 2001: 8). So given all these substantial similarities,

⁴ For a chronological overview of the Iraq and Iran crisis, see the nuclear chronologies of the Iraq and Iran country profiles of the Nuclear Threat Initiative: http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iraq/Nuclear/2121_6238.html and http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/Nuclear/chronology_2008.html. For a chronological analysis of the European negotiations with Iran, see Tom Sauer, "Struggling on the World Scene: An Over-ambitious EU versus a Committed Iran," *European Security* 17.2-3 (2008)273-293.

⁵ Horizontal proliferation basically means that a non-WMD-state acquires WMD capabilities. Subsequently, the term proliferation will refer to horizontal proliferation.

⁶ Debates on the positive aspects of proliferation are largely confined to the academic world. Kenneth Waltz, one of the most prominent International Relations scholars, argues for instance that nuclear proliferation can be a stabilizing factor in the international system. For his argument regarding Iran, see Scott D. Sagan, Kenneth Waltz and Richard K. Betts, "A Nuclear Iran: Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?," *Journal of International Affairs* 60.2 (2007)135-150.

where is it possible to find the differences that may explain the distinct EU foreign policy output in Iran and Iraq?

One key issue is how Member States and their governments perceived security in the two cases. Before the 2003 invasion, Iraq became clearly a major threat in the eyes of several EU Member States. The now infamous ‘September Dossier’, one of the key documents that justified Britain’s participation in the invasion of Iraq, saw for example a “current and serious threat to the UK national interest” (*Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government* 2002: 3). Tony Blair, then Britain’s Prime Minister, reaffirmed that he is “...in no doubt that the threat is serious and current, that [Saddam] has made progress on WMD, and that he has to be stopped” (*Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government* 2002: 3).⁷ To a certain extent, the increasing threat perception is also reflected in EU documents, thus showing in how far EU Member States were actually willing to compromise: While already several previous EU declarations and statements had condemned in harsh words the behaviour of the Iraqi regime regarding the international inspections of its alleged WMD programmes, the last EU demarche before the US-led invasion of Iraq was the most hawkish statement so far: “Time is running out. UNSCR 1441 gave Iraq a final opportunity to disarm peacefully. If it does not take this chance it will carry the responsibility for all the consequences” (*Demarche by the Presidency on Behalf of the EU Regarding Iraq* 2003). But this was the maximum consensus all Member States could agree on. At heart, some Member States, particularly Germany, did not share Britain’s and other’s perception of an immediate and urgent threat to national security. They rather believed that in spite of Saddam Hussein’s delaying tactics there was still sufficient time for further multilateral inspections to determine if Iraq was pursuing a clandestine WMD programme or not. It should be pointed out, however, that the bitter disagreement over the threat posed by Iraq did not last for long. Once the invasion altered completely the security environment, the EU was able to find consensus again. In fact, already on the very day of the start of the invasion of Iraq, the European Council in Brussels adopted in its Presidency Conclusions the core elements of the EU’s post-invasion Iraq policy (Brussels European Council 2003). It even called for “...a comprehensive, coherent and effective

⁷ The Dossier came later under increasing scrutiny and was criticized for its lack of caveats. See Mike Nartker, “British Dossier on Prewar Iraqi WMD Efforts Failed to Contain Sufficient Caveats, Inquiry Finds,” *Global Security Newswire* 14 July 2004.

multilateral policy of the international community to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction” (Brussels European Council 2003: 33).⁸

In the case of Iran, the security perception has been radically different.⁹ In general, no Member State has perceived the Iranian nuclear programme as an immediate threat to national security. Consequently, security perceptions have never been pushed to the extreme as in Iraq. On the contrary, the first time the Iranian nuclear programme was mentioned in EU Council Conclusions the Union merely stated that “The nature of some aspects of Iran’s programme raises serious concerns...” (General Affairs and External Relations Council 2003: 24). Security has been basically seen in terms of regional stability, with a special focus on the danger of a domino effect of nuclear proliferation (Russell 2008), and in terms of the stability of the global non-proliferation order. In the words of Javier Solana, the High Representative, “Even if Iranian intentions are peaceful, it would be dangerous for others even to suspect Iran of having a nuclear weapons programme. That alone could trigger a nuclear arms race. More nuclear weapons in this volatile region is the last thing we want. At this point the whole of the NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty] regime would be more or less in tatters” (Solana 2005: 5). Until 2007-2008 the EU even avoided to use in their official documents on Iran the terms ‘threat’ or ‘WMD.’ The Iran problem was rather presented as a matter of confidence regarding almost purely technical issues such as uranium conversion or enrichment that came up after 2002 (Fitzpatrick 2006; IAEA Board of Governors 2003).¹⁰ Moreover, the EU has gone to great lengths to justify their worries regarding Iranian nuclear activities, which are not necessarily illegal under international law and which are, in fact, carried out in several EU Member States (General Affairs and External Relations Council

⁸ The Conclusions were published five days after the official end of the invasion, on 5 May 2003. The only other official EU Iraq-related document published during the invasion is: Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Consequences of the War in Iraq for Energy and Transport* COM(2003) 164 final (Brussels, 2003).

⁹ The following analysis is based on the analysis of recurring themes in Council Conclusions, Presidency Conclusions, statements and/or speeches by Javier Solana, the EU/E3 and the EU/E3+3. Due to the large amount of documents, they are not listed individually. The Council has adopted so far 24 Conclusions in relation with the Iranian nuclear programme, five in 2003, five in 2004, three in 2005, seven in 2006 and four in 2007. They are available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/App/newsroom/loadbook.aspx?BID=71&LANG=1&cmsid=349>. European Council Presidency Conclusions have dealt with the Iranian nuclear programme ten times, twice in 2003, three times in 2004, twice in 2005, twice in 2006 and once in 2007. They are available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/App/newsroom/loadbook.aspx?BID=76&LANG=1&cmsid=347>. The other statements are available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/>, <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Startseite.html> and <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/>.

¹⁰ A senior E3 diplomat even complained that the EU has not been able to transmit sufficiently the potential danger of the Iranian programme. See Interview, Brussels, January 2009.

2006a: 13).¹¹ Only since 2007, when a controversial internal EU document concluded that Iran would be able develop an atomic bomb (Dombey and Schmid 2007), has the EU's interpretation of the Iranian nuclear programme become more outspoken. However, the threat-based statements are usually balanced by much more moderate views that do not focus on national or EU security.¹²

In contrast to Iraq, the EU has also favoured a much more comprehensive approach in its relations with Iran, taking into consideration "...terrorism, Iran's approach to the Middle East peace process, regional issues as well as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (General Affairs and External Relations Council 2006b: 10). Even though the nuclear issue has become the EU's top priority, other issues, especially human rights, have remained high on the agenda. The EU's comprehensive approach is also reflected in the agreements the EU has signed with Iran in Tehran (2003) and Paris (2004) and, particularly, in the proposals for long-term agreements the EU presented to Iran in 2005 and together with China, Russia and the United States in 2006 and 2008. These agreements include such diverse issues as unilateral security assurances by France and the UK and support for Iran's World Trade Organization accession.

Finally, the EU's more balanced security perception regarding Iran is reflected in the emphasis on international cooperation and on a common European approach. The EU has made a huge effort to work in accordance with relevant international institutions, most notably the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog. Already at the very beginning of the Iranian nuclear crisis, when an Iranian opposition group published evidence of a clandestine nuclear programme in August 2002 (Sauer 2007), the EU had waited almost a year for the first investigation report by the IAEA before it started to act. Likewise, EU Member States stressed the common European dimension of the Iran policy. Although the initial E3 *directoire* consisting of France, Germany and the United Kingdom was highly controversial and never got an explicit endorsement by the Council,¹³ the EU was able to find a common format that was acceptable to all Member States:

¹¹ In particular, uranium enrichment and uranium conversion. For more detailed information on these processes and the involvement of EU Member States, see *Country Nuclear Fuel Cycle Profiles*, Technical Reports Series 425 (Vienna: International Atomic Energy Agency, 2005).

¹² A particularly illustrative example is the *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World*, S407/08 (Brussels, 2008).

¹³ Council Conclusions spoke for the first time of the activity of France, Germany and the United Kingdom in late 2004, i.e. almost one year after the first E3 mission to Tehran. However, the term E3 or EU/E3 has never been used in Council or Presidency Conclusions. These terms are only used in reports or internal documents.

Through the inclusion of the High Representative the new EU/E3 format got the necessary link with the rest of the EU Member States to establish a common European Iran policy.¹⁴ At the same time, the E3 themselves emphasized the European dimension of their efforts. Already the first E3 mission to Tehran in 2003, which was basically a spontaneous trip by three national Foreign Ministers without any EU endorsement, was for Jack Straw, then the British foreign secretary, “...consistent with the common approach to Iran agreed by several European Councils” (Straw 2003b) and “a demonstrable example of how [British] membership of the EU enhances [Britain’s] standing in the world” (Straw 2003a).

Use of Means

How can the EU react to problems such as the alleged Iraqi and Iranian WMD programmes? The options are diverse, ranging from dialogue over negotiations, positive and negative incentives and sanctions to military means. The obvious difference between Iraq and Iran is that in the former case some EU Member States decided to participate in military actions whereas in the latter the military option has come up only as a hypothetical possibility. In short, in Iraq the options were pushed to one extreme, i.e. invasion without a clear multilateral endorsement, thus laying bare the deep divisions that exist in the EU regarding military means and causing the EU’s division. In Iran, on the other hand, the EU’s measures have remained within the limits of generally acceptable means supported by the United Nations. But why was there a military option in the case of Iraq but not in the case of Iran?

The short answer is path dependency. Between 1990 and 2002-2003 the international community and, in particular, the EU dealt with both cases in radically different ways: Whereas Iraq policies were largely confrontation-based, Iran policies were based to a large extent on dialogue and cooperation. The confrontation with Iraq started with the 1990 Gulf War and the dismantling of Iraq’s WMD programmes by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM).¹⁵ The lack of cooperation of the Iraqi regime with UNSCOM led finally the United States and the UK to the conclusion that it was necessary to bomb suspected WMD installations in Iraq. However, the

¹⁴ Interviews or phone interviews with EU and Member States officials, Brussels and Madrid, December 2008-March 2009. Only the Italians were not completely satisfied with the new format, but they were able to gain ‘privileged information exchange.’ See Interview with E3 official, Brussels, January 2009.

¹⁵ UNSCOM was replaced in 1999 by the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). UNMOVIC was finally dissolved in 2007. For more information, see <http://www.un.org/Depts/unscom/> and <http://www.unmovic.org/>.

ensuing military measures – the 1998 Operation Desert Fox – led to deep divisions among UNSC members and, even more importantly, to frictions among EU members. In other words, the disagreements about Operation Desert Fox were the prelude of the disagreements about Operation Iraqi Freedom, i.e. the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Although EU Member States supported countless UNSC Resolutions against Iraq and agreed on coercive measures such as sanctions or a new UN inspection commission (UNMOVIC) after Operation Desert Fox, unilateral military measures were clearly outside the limits of European consensus. This is underlined by the EU's strong action in Iraq once the military option was off the table and the EU could become active where one of its main strengths lies: post-conflict reconstruction (Commission of the European Communities 2004, 2006).¹⁶

In Iran, the EU's dialogue policy can be traced back to the 1992 Edinburgh European Council, which established the "critical dialogue" with Iran (European Council in Edinburgh 1992). Although the European approach differed radically from the American policy aimed at the international isolation of Iran, the EU maintained almost continuously its dialogue with Iran. It focused largely on human rights and terrorism.¹⁷ After the 1997 Mykonos trial¹⁸ led to the end of the critical dialogue, the election of the reformer Khatami as President of Iran, improved again EU-Iran relations and the Union resumed its talks with Iran in 1998, now in the form of the so-called comprehensive dialogue that also included discussions on WMD issues.¹⁹ In 2002, after the re-election of Khatami, the EU initiated a formal human rights dialogue with Iran and the negotiation of a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and a Political Dialogue Agreement (PDA) (Martínez Carbonell 2004). Thus, once evidence of clandestine Iranian nuclear activity appeared in August 2002, the EU had established already a "tangled web of negotiations" (Posch 2006) with Iran. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the E3 and later the EU/E3 and EU/E3+3²⁰ have focused their efforts regarding Iran's nuclear programme on dialogue and negotiations. Javier Solana, who has become the chief negotiator with Iran, has held countless meetings with

¹⁶ EU measures include substantial humanitarian and reconstruction aid, a rule of law mission (EUJUST LEX), the opening of a Commission Delegation and the negotiation of a Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

¹⁷ Arms control issues played only a subordinate role.

¹⁸ In 1997, a German court ruled that the then Iranian intelligence minister ordered the assassination of Kurdish Iranian opposition leaders in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin in 1992.

¹⁹ For an overview of the EU's critical and comprehensive dialogues, see Johannes Reissner, "Europe and Iran: Critical Dialogue," *Honey and Vinegar: Incentives, Sanctions, and Foreign Policy*, eds. Richard N. Haas and Meghan L. O'Sullivan (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

²⁰ EU/E3+3 is used by the EU internally instead of P5 plus 1, meaning the five permanent members of the UNSC plus Germany.

his Iranian counterparts.²¹ Even though the TCA and PDA negotiations were suspended in 2005²² and Iran has refused to participate in the comprehensive as well as the human rights dialogue since 2003 and 2004 respectively, contacts between Iran and the EU have never broken off completely. Apart from Javier Solana's negotiations, it has maintained at least limited (and often indirect) cooperation in the fields of anti-drug-trafficking, support for Afghan refugees and higher education (Erasmus Mundus programme).²³ Moreover, various types of European documents, e.g. Council or Presidency Conclusions, reaffirm regularly the EU's continued support for a diplomatic solution of the Iranian nuclear problem.

However, given Iran's reluctant cooperation with the EU on the nuclear issue, a pure persuasion-based approach was not sustainable. Once Iran resumed under its new President Ahmadinejad uranium conversion in August 2005, a violation of the terms of the 2004 Paris Agreement, the EU/E3 started to work towards the adoption of coercive measures against Iran. It managed to involve China, Russia and the United States, the three non-European permanent UNSC members, and in February 2006, the IAEA Board of Governors sent finally the Iran case to the UNSC, thus opening the door for several Resolutions calling for sanctions on Iran (Resolutions 1737, 1747 and 1803). The EU has implemented slightly tighter sanctions than those of the UNSC Resolutions, thus demonstrating the EU's ability to implement coercive measures against Iran.²⁴ Yet, at the same time, it has maintained its willingness to negotiate with Iran. This has become known as the dual-track approach, i.e. the EU imposes sanctions but is also open for dialogue.

The only problematic issue so far has been the use of military force against Iranian nuclear installations. In this regard, the use of unilateral military force by EU Member States has never been an issue, as they basically lack the necessary capabilities. However, the EU's support of possible US or Israeli airstrikes might be highly controversial. When Javier Solana was asked by

²¹ Apart from long-term agreements with Iran, Solana offered different incentives to entice Iran. In 2007, the EU proposed the 'suspension for suspension' option, i.e. the parallel suspension of international sanctions and uranium enrichment in Iran. In 2008, the Union went even one step further making the 'freeze for freeze' offer. That is, the EU would maintain the present sanctions and Iran its existing level of enrichment activities but without increasing them.

²² The negotiations were also on hold between the Tehran Agreement (October 2003) and the Paris Agreement (November 2004).

²³ The EU is also a firm supporter of the IAEA, which has carried out so far 74 (active or completed) technical cooperation projects in the field nuclear energy. See <http://www-tc.iaea.org/tcweb/projectinfo/default.asp>.

²⁴ Sanctions include mainly travel restrictions for certain Iranian officials, financial restrictions and a ban on Iranian arms exports.

one of the readers of the BBC World Service (Persian service) how the EU would react to US military actions against Iran, he answered evasively: “The EU supports international legality. Iran must comply with its obligations in order to contribute to regional stability. Dialogue remains at the core of the process” (Solana 2004). However, despite French saber rattling in 2007 (Sciolino 2007), the military option is so far off the table. Even the militarily most capable EU Member States puts its weight behind the EU’s dual-track approach: “The UK Government has repeatedly made clear that it is pursuing a diplomatic solution 100%, which it believes can achieve the necessary results” (British Embassy in Tehran 2008). But what happens if it does not achieve the desired results? A now infamous gaffe by the then French President Jacques Chirac suggests that there exist among European policy-makers alternatives to military strikes. He told reporters of the New York Times “...that if Iran had one or two nuclear weapons, it would not pose a big danger, and that if Iran were to launch a nuclear weapon against a country like Israel, it would lead to the immediate destruction of Tehran” (Sciolino and Bennhold 2007: A1).²⁵ In short, the alternative is the containment of Iran. However, Europe’s reaction if the US or Israel do not accept containment as a viable option and decide to strike against Iran is still far from clear. As a senior advisor to Javier Solana wrote in 2004, “...a decision to bomb Iran would have enormous consequences for Britain and the rest of Europe. It would be Europe’s moment of truth: split again or stay united” (Everts 2004: 36).²⁶

Transatlantic Relations

The United States had a conflict-laden relation with Iran and Iraq many years before 2002. Iraq had been a source of conflict at least since the 1990 Gulf War. The problems with Iran can be traced back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the 1979-1981 hostage crisis, when the United States cut off its diplomatic relations with Iran. When George W. Bush became President the US belligerent attitude towards the two countries intensified further. In the 2002 State of the Union address they were named (together with North Korea) as members of the so-called “axis of evil” (“Bush State of the Union Address” 2002). Regime change was the open aim of US policies in both countries. As the doctrine of ‘pre-emptive action’ showed (*The National Security Strategy*

²⁵ Although Jacques Chirac retracted the remarks shortly after the interview, the interview itself was tape-recorded and on-the-record.

²⁶ This view was largely shared in interviews with European officials in Brussels in December 2008 and January 2009.

of the United States of America 2002), the United States was also prepared to use military force against both countries. From mid-2002 on, the Bush administration worked clearly towards the invasion of Iraq, whereas Iran has been regularly threatened with airstrikes against nuclear installations by US officials. However, there existed a significant difference: The US actually decided to invade Iraq, whereas it refused to engage further with Iran.²⁷ Thus, the EU Member States had to choose if they should follow US policies in Iraq, but not in Iran. On the contrary, in the case of Iran Europeans got the opportunity to pursue their own policies (Harnisch 2007; Kupchan 2006). As a consequence, in Iran Europeans were not confronted with one of the most controversial questions in European foreign and security policy, namely if the EU should or should not follow the lead of the only remaining superpower in the world (Crowe 2003: 535). In Iraq, however, this question led to deep divisions among European states. As Anand Menon argues, “The build-up to the war in Iraq revealed increasingly apparent and bitter divisions between the European states. At the heart of these disputes were opposing conceptions of the appropriate relationship for Europe to maintain with the United States” (Menon 2004: 638).

However, the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis was ultimately not divisive because of the question of Europe’s relationship with America as such, but because EU Member States, in particular the ‘big 3,’ chose to push their Iraq policies towards opposing extremes: Germany and France openly disagreed with the United States, whereas Britain fully supported the US-led invasion. In International Relations terms, Germany and France tried to balance the United States, whereas Britain was bandwagoning. It is not clear why these countries chose to push their Iraq policies towards these two extremes – the individual leaders, Jacques Chirac, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder (Hill 2004; Peterson 2004), and the US administration’s heavy pressure (Everts 2004: 36) certainly played a decisive role – but it made an EU-wide consensus impossible. This does not mean, however, that consensus would have been impossible. After all, in practical terms, the support of the invasion of Iraq was also significant from those states that opposed the war, in particular Germany that allowed the coalition forces to use its airspace and military bases and met its NATO obligations. In fact, Germany’s support was more important for the war efforts than that of smaller EU Member or Candidate States that to a lesser or larger degree supported the United States (Grigorescu 2008; Peterson 2004). Concerning the long-term effects of the

²⁷ In 2003, Iran offered to negotiate directly with the United States. But the US administration rejected the proposal. See Tom Sauer, "Struggling on the World Scene: An Over-ambitious EU versus a Committed Iran," *European Security* 17.2-3 (2008)273-293.

divisions over Iraq, the jury is still out. There has been a lot of discussion on the consequences for the transatlantic relationship (Lindstrom 2003; Zaborowski 2006) and EU unity (Crowe 2003; Menon 2004; Peterson 2004). At least regarding CFSP, the long-term consequences have not been as severe as feared, as can be seen in the 2003 European Security Strategy, numerous military and civilian EU missions since 2003 and the development of an active EU non-proliferation policy.

In the case of Iran, the EU and the United States were already at odds well before 2002. While Europe pursued its dialogues with Iran, the United States implemented an aggressive sanctions policy that also targeted European companies doing business in Iran (Reissner 2000). However, Iraq-style divisions between EU Member States over US leadership were virtually impossible, as America refused to lead on Iran. Ironically, it was the United States that suffered from internal divisions over European leadership. For a long time, the US administration was deeply divided between the supporters of a stronger US involvement in the EU/E3 approach and those advocating unilateral military strikes against Iran (Kubbig 2008). These divisions were reflected in the almost 'EU-ish' compromise formula regarding the US approach towards Iran: "All options are on the table" (Kubbig 2008). Although it was at first sight shorthand for the threat of military actions, a closer look reveals that the US administration was too divided to actually decide which option it should pursue. In short, the United States was not able to implement a coherent Iran policy. In common EU-US Declarations on Iran, the texts resembled largely the moderate European positions at the time without significant American input.²⁸

Since 2005, the US administration has become more supportive of European efforts. And in 2007, when the US National Intelligence Estimate on Iran concluded "...that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons programme" (Office of the Director of National Intelligence 2007), the American military option was finally taken off the table, at least momentarily. However, in line with the 2006 National Security Strategy, which states that America "may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran" (*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* 2006), the United States has also tried to push the EU towards more forceful actions, in particular tougher sanctions. Moreover, the United States has refused to support European negotiations with a crucial offer of security guarantees for Iran (Leonard 2005). Yet,

²⁸ See, for example, Council of the European Union, *EU-US Declaration on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction* 10761/1/04 REV 1 (Presse 206) (Dromoland Castle, 2004).

this dissonance between the two sides of the Atlantic have not affected in any significant way intra-European unity.

Conclusion

Iran and Iraq are two paradigmatic cases of European foreign and security policy. They show how in similar circumstances the European Union can become either a powerful actor in its own right – as during the Iranian nuclear crisis – or an insignificant foreign policy dwarf – as during the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis. Such radically different foreign policy results poses a serious challenge to existing concepts of European foreign and security policy, as it is necessary to explain simultaneously significant foreign policy output and the lack thereof. The key argument of this paper is that in international crises that do not present immediate military threats to the survival of Member States, i.e. basically in all present crises, the EU does not have to reconcile the opposing national interests of its Member States, but merely the different interpretations along three core themes: security perception, use of means and transatlantic relationship. In other words, although the EU's CFSP is an intergovernmental policy, foreign policy output requires only consensus along three core axes of foreign policy thinking and not between 15 or now 27 national interests. As long as Member States do not push extreme positions in the three main themes, forceful, though still measured EU foreign policy output is likely.

The empirical part of the paper has shown that in the case of Iraq some Member States pushed too far towards opposing positions in the three core themes: Whereas some believed that the Iraq case was an immediate threat to national security that required swift unilateral military action under the leadership of the United States, others saw it merely as a serious concern that required further international inspections and opposed the use of force by the United States and its allies. Consequently, EU unity during the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis effectively broke down. In the case of Iran, Member States have refrained from pursuing extreme positions as in Iraq: The security perceptions have been balanced between threat-based and more comprehensive security interpretations that also take into consideration other aspects such as human rights or regional and global stability. At the same time, unilateral military action has not formed part of the options of the EU Member States. The EU's measures have been rather a mix of persuasive

means such as dialogue and coercive power, particularly in the form of sanctions. Moreover, all EU activity has been firmly embedded in a multilateral framework. Finally, since the United States has not implemented an active Iran policy of their own, the EU and its Member States have not been confronted with a possibly divisive US leadership.

Comparing the EU foreign and security policy outputs in Iran and Iraq, finally, allows drawing a relatively clear picture of the limits within which the EU can find foreign policy consensus during international crises: First, if security is perceived without very obvious reasons in terms of immediate threats the EU reaches its limits for consensus. Likewise, if a clear problem such as the clandestine Iranian nuclear activities had been defined by some in very elusive security terms, consensus would have been difficult as well. Secondly, as both the Iraq and Iran case have shown, the EU is able to agree on coercive measures. Military force, however, is much more problematic, especially if it is not based on a clear multilateral mandate, though it is not an absolute taboo topic, as the numerous EU military missions in recent years have demonstrated. At the same, pure persuasion in the form of dialogue, the other extreme option to act in an international crisis, is only a possibility if the EU does not have to deal with a concrete security problem such as the Iranian nuclear programme. Thirdly, whenever the EU has to find consensus concerning US leadership, both uncritical bandwagoning as well as open opposition are outside the limits of a common European foreign and security policy. In general, these limits are broader than sceptics may concede, but more narrow than EU enthusiasts might believe. In the future, we may expect more measured EU foreign policy outputs as in Iran, but also occasional disagreements over more extreme policy options as in Iraq.

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