AI and the Future of Warfare

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The EU's Role as a Security Actor and Its Impact on Its Identity

Did the EU Forget about its Values?

The world is under constant stress. Proxy wars, interstate wars, civil wars and hybrid wars are daily life. The number of victims was the highest in 30 years. For this reason, security and defence are determining geopolitics and the balance of international power. The EU, as an originally value-based and liberal union seems to notice that defence and security are dominating world politics and were too long denied and ignored. The fatal mistake of relying on the US and NATO shows its consequences in times when instability and uncertainty need to be avoided. Changes and action are demanded but the challenge is to find a balance between the EU as a value-based and a security-focused union.

The EU's History as a Security Actor

The EU evolved as an economic union. With the Maastricht treaty in 1992, the area of CFSP was introduced which marked the beginning of the common foreign and security policy. Further treaties and reforms developed the security sector and the EU slowly evolved as an international security actor with sufficient security capabilities. Due to the European defence fund, battle groups, and reforms such as EDIS or PESCO, one can clearly notice a European awakening after leaving global security actors, such as Russia, China and the US free rein.

How the EU Perceives Its Security Goals

The EUGS in 2016 and 2019 have shown the EU's goals and visions for the future. The concept of strategic autonomy showed the realization that the EU needs to limit its dependence on other global security actors such as the US or NATO. However, liberal values and cooperation are still heavily important. Moreover, the shift from single policies to policy nexus shows the increasing importance of security issues. The EU's comprehensive and integrated approach to external conflicts and crises enables the EU to coordinate conflicts including diplomatic, economic and military tools.

These core slogans of the EUGS and the concept of principled pragmatism, combining realism and idealism, show the changing focus on security politics. But what happened to the EU's former identity as a value-based, liberal union?

How can Identity and Military Operations be Combined?

Scholars debate whether the EU is a normative, realist or liberalist power. Nevertheless, when looking at the EU's military operations, one can state that there was a significant shift from value- to utility-based operations. Earlier missions were guided by humanitarian concerns, peace agreements and democratic aspirations. Contrary, recent military missions, e.g., EU-NAVFOR, EUTM Mali or Med Sophia are utility-based and motivated by trade interest or border safety. This raises the question of how the EU identifies and if it still relates to its old image. The EU's traditional identity has been built on the promotional core liberal values. Due to the rise in military engagement, the EU's peaceful, value-based identity is challenged. Critical voices claim that this militarization and security focus is antagonistic to its peaceful identity and destroys its identity as a moral, normative authority. This shift from soft to hard power may have an impact not only on the EUs internal identity perception but also on its external one and how other global players perceive the EU as an international security actor. This margin needs to be well-balanced and demands an equal focus on security and a commitment to liberal values.

Challenges the EU Needs to Face

Not only is the EU facing an identity crisis, but also a crisis of how to compete with other strong security actors. Horizontal and vertical cohesion, meaning the balance between EU institutions as well as policy areas is contributing to the inefficiency of decision-making in military operations. Additionally, strategic autonomy and finding a balance between independence and cooperation with other security actors confront the EU with a challenge. It is well known that member states have diverse perspectives on security issues also due to their political situation and a cost-benefit analysis. Moreover, a lack of consensus building and the inefficiency of effective decision-making deteriorate sending a clear signal and position in international conflicts. However, what is needed is a review of effective decision-making and fostering effective synergies between policy areas and organizations. Therefore, The EU as one of the strongest international organizations needs to depict strength and unity in order to guarantee internal and external safety. Under these considerations, the EU might not lose connection to other global powers.

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