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5 European Union's Military Operations
The Use of an Adaptive Approach to Face Security (Dis)Order

Sergio AGUILAR[1]

Abstract: To improve its capacity at managing crises, the European Union (EU) has sought to broaden its security and defense identity since the 1990s, deploying thirteen military operations and missions. Like other world powers, the EU has adapted its foreign policy to changing circumstances and strategic and economic interests. As the EU has enlarged and deepened its integration, questions arise about how its common foreign and security policies have evolved over time and whether these policies have expressed long-term interests or have constantly adapted to novel circumstances. This chapter discusses the reality of EU military engagement overseas through the lens of the complexity theory. The study confronts the aims presented in official EU narrative with practices on the ground through data collected in primary and secondary sources that highlight that the adaptive approach has led to three phases of modification in EU military operations and capabilities, as the EU attempts to become a global security provider: ambition during the first decade of the Common Security and Defense Policy, contraction between 2009 and 2016, and adjustment in today's new global order. Conclusions suggest that not only is the EU's institutional ambition of collective engagement in overseas operations in constant tension with the preferences and interests of its member states, but that EU operations are challenged by a changing global (dis) order necessitating constant adaptation.

What the European Union (EU) calls "crisis management operations" emerged as a pragmatic response to security challenges it faced. The EU has striven to develop its capacity for independent military action since the late 1990s, when the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) was first launched (it was renamed as the Common Security and Defense Policy - CSDP in 2009). Since 2003, the EU has conducted thirty-six missions and operations in twenty countries. Twenty-three of these actions have been civilian missions and thirteen have been military operations and missions.

The EU defines military operations as interventions with an executive mandate, while military missions consist of interventions with a non-executive mandate. The choice of intervention type depends on the nature of the crisis at stake. Operations involve actions that replace the host country's actions, while missions imply that the EU only supports

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the host country in an advisory capacity (Council of the EU 2014). Moreover, the EU has developed various military operations and missions (also referred to as "peace operations" in this chapter). The "European Union Force" (EUFOR) is a ground force, while naval forces fall under the jurisdiction of the "European Union Naval Force" (EU NAVFOR); and "training missions" stand for "European Union Training Mission" (EUTM) (Council of the EU 2018). Additionally, military interventions have ranged from advisory missions involving fewer than a dozen experts to large-scale operations deploying thousands of military personnel. However, although the EU aims at becoming a global security provider, the actual importance of EU military operations and missions can be questioned. Given its population (447.7 million inhabitants), economic weight (one fourth of the world's GDP), and military resources (1,521,000 troops in active service and 14 percent of the global defense budget in 2020) (EC 2020; IISS 2021; SIPRI 2021), the Union has sought to play an important role in international security. However, it appears that EU aspirations have not met operational reality in terms of military operations and missions. Indeed, a "capability–expectation gap" (see Hill 1993) has emerged between the expectation of the EU and its apparent influence in global military interventions. This chapter assesses past and present EU military operations and missions to analyze the role the EU plays as an international security provider. The focus on military engagement excludes an examination of other ways in which the EU also engages internationally (e.g., through civilian missions and diplomatic actions). Nonetheless, analyzing military action remains particularly useful in evaluating the EU as an international security actor.

In practice, the EU started getting involved militarily in 1992, when the Petersberg Declaration set a range of military actions and functions the EU would undertake. These included humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, and the sending of combat forces to manage crises (WEU 1992). These tasks were later incorporated into the Treaty of the European Union in 1997. To fulfill its military functions, the EU has developed policies, strategies, structures, decision-making and financing procedures, capabilities, and legal and operational tools. These tools have included, among others, the European Security Strategy (ESS) (EU 2003a), the Headline Goals (Council of the EU 2004), and the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) (EU 2016), the latter arising later than the other instruments. Frameworks for permanent relations between the EU and NATO (known as the "Berlin Plus arrangements") (EU 2003b) and with the UN (UN 2003) were also established to support EU military deployments.

The EU's military involvement overseas, as well as its performance in security and defense, have attracted considerable academic scrutiny and generated an extensive literature. Studies have assessed the EU's success and failure as a conflict manager (Kronenberger and Wouters 2004; Diez et al. 2006; Tocci 2007; Whitman and Wolff 2010), as well as its ambitions and achievements (Giegerich 2008) and its credibility and effectiveness (e.g., Tardy 2015a; Hyde-Price 2018). Research has also targeted the EU's transatlantic links (Posen 2006; Howorth and Menon 2009; Giegerich 2010), its relations with NATO (Mace 2004; Ulriksen et al. 2004; Duke 2008) and the UN (Charbonneau 2009), and the discrepancies between the rhetorical aims and interests of the EU, its stated goals, and the instruments it uses in practice (Tocci 2009). Adding

to this scholarship, this chapter draws on the complexity theory to explore military operations and explain how the EU has adapted to changes in the security environment, as well as the challenges this environment presents. Complex systems arise when a set of elements or units become interconnected, so that changes taking place in individual units or in the way units interact effect changes in other parts of the system. Moreover, such systems exhibit their own properties and behaviors (Jervis 1997). Their open nature creates dynamics that must be explained in terms of internal logics and relationships with the environment. Interconnectivity indicates that each individual element exists in relation to the others; thus, each part of the system is affected and influenced, at any time, directly or indirectly, by at least one other part of the system (Ricigliano 2012). Moreover, interconnectivity leads to emergence, which explains both how the elements of the system interact with each other to maintain themselves and how new structures, forms, and functions are generated by these interactions (Williams and Hummelbrunner 2010). The new structures, forms, and functions in turn interact with, and causally impact, the parts from which they emerged. Additionally, when small changes in any part of a system—or in a system's environment—produce large changes throughout that system, nonlinearity is observed. Finally, complex systems potentially adapt according to feedback, since the way they respond is conditioned by both past and present situations (Wight 2015). When uncertainty and unpredictability prevail, systems manage through an adaptive process in which resilience plays an important role. Resilience is "the ability of a system to resist, absorb, recover from, or adapt to (adverse) changes in condition" (Cavelty and Giroux 2015, 211) while retaining essentially the same function, structure, and identity (Walker et al. 2004). Therefore, resilience also entails persistence (the capacity to remain in an original state), adaptability (the capacity to adjust responses to changing external drivers and internal processes), and transformability (the capacity to create a new domain when conditions make the existing system untenable, thus moving it towards a new system) (Gunderson 2000; Folke 2006; Scheffer 2009; Folke et al. 2010). Drawing on these key assertions of complexity theory, this chapter aims to unveil how and why the EU has moved in certain ways in the field of military operations and missions.

I argue that since their inception, EU military operations and missions have been guided by tensions between the role the Union wants to play in the field of international security and the dynamics of both the Union itself and the international system. Moreover, in terms of military operations and missions, the EU has dealt with these tensions through an adaptive approach that encompasses different phases, which are successively characterized by ambitious expansion, contraction, and adjustment. To substantiate this argument, I use qualitative analysis of quantitative data based on primary and secondary sources. Data were collected from the EU's Global Engagement project (Di Mauro et al. 2017), EEAS factsheets, and publicly available information regarding these operations and missions, with a focus on context, size, mandate, region of operation, duration, risks involved, and budget allocated. These elements were chosen to examine the nature of military deployments that took place between 2003 and 2020. Additional data were collected from various official speeches and documents about the EU's military engagement. Drawing parallels between intentions and reality, I demonstrate that the

EU has often engaged militarily overseas through an adaptive approach and that this engagement has not matched its ambition, nor the expectation of the international community. In its military operations and missions, the EU has adapted to changes within the Union as well as to external dynamics in three phases. During the first phase (1999-2009), the EU created the necessary conditions for its broader commitment to international security issues. During the second phase (2010-2016), a contraction can be observed, which was due to obstacles the Union faced when acting on its intentions. When additional challenges arose, especially in the international system, the European bloc then moved to a third phase of adjustment (2017-today).

Phase I (1999-2009): Ambitions - Adapting to a New Security Environment

The first phase of EU military operations and missions coincides with Javier Solana's term as High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy—today's High Representative for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (hereinafter "High Representative")—from 1999 to 2009. One key characteristic of complex systems is that they adjust their responses to the challenges posed by both external drivers and internal processes. In the 1990s, the EU was formally established by the Maastricht Treaty, after which it initiated an enlargement and economic integration process. On the one hand, the unprecedented period of peace and stability in Western Europe led to an enthusiastic narrative: the EU "[had] never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free" (EU 2003a). On the other hand, Europe's inability to manage conflicts on its neighbors' soil became evident, for example during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia (Hyde-Price 2018). This inability contributed to the Franco-British St. Malo Declaration in 1998, which focused on the EU's need to "have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises" (CVCE 1998). The following year, the European Council underlined its determination to develop an autonomous capacity in order to carry out military operations in response to international crises (European Parliament 1999). As a consequence, the Headline Goal was approved at the Helsinki Summit (December 1999), which planned for the development of a self-sustained military force of up to 50,000–60,000 individuals able to undertake the full range of tasks set in the Petersberg Declaration (Council of the EU 1999). At the same time, outside Europe, the UN's revision process on peacekeeping seemed to indicate that regional organizations would assume an increasing role as security providers (see UN 2000). Moreover, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the US, followed by the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the US's "war on terror," influenced the EU in its defense apparatus and its role in international security. Hence, High Representative Javier Solana, initiated the European Security Strategy. Although this document was a policy paper rather than a strategic plan, it nevertheless outlined principles about how the Union should respond to international crises, and it set out guidelines for addressing threats, ensuring safety

in the countries bordering Europe and committing to an international order based on multilateralism (EU 2003a). As a result, key institutions were established, such as the Political and Security Committee (2000)—responsible for the CSDP—the Military Committee (2001), and the Military Staff (2001), charged with providing strategic advice to the High Representative.

As a complex system, the EU has organized itself to face internal and external security and defense challenges. During phase I, it created new processes and institutional bodies within the bloc to allow greater proactivity in the military field. Furthermore, past experiences, especially those emanating from other organizations such as the UN and NATO, led the EU to develop guidelines for crisis management centered on the ability to combine civilian and military instruments (Juncos 2020): the "made in Europe crisis management" (Türke 2016). In the EU, there was enthusiasm about the bloc playing a major role in international security, and this positive outlook was seen in the European Security Strategy, which indicated that the EU was particularly well equipped to respond to multi-faceted security situations (EU 2003a). Moreover, the High Representative asserted that the Union was suited to carry out actions drawing on "a mixture of civilian, military, economic, political and institution-building tools" (Solana 2007, 2), as opposed to purely military operations.

In this context, the EU showed relentless activism in terms of military operations and missions during that period: six military operations were deployed between 2003 and 2008. Table 1 indicates that most operations took place in Africa (four) and the Balkans (two), where troops operated under executive mandates that focused on implementing agreements as well as stabilizing situations, protecting civilians, delivering humanitarian aid, and fighting against piracy. When it started, EUFOR Althea was the largest operation in scope (7,000 troops); Artemis, EUFOR Congo, and Atalanta included approximately 2,000 troops; and EUFOR Chad/CAR involved approximately 3,300 troops. The operations generally have not lasted long. With the exception of Atalanta and Althea, which are still ongoing, other operations lasted only two to twelve months. Consequently, the security impact of these various operations was also short-lived in host countries. Notably, Althea replaced the NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina to oversee the military implementation of the Dayton Agreement that ended the war in the former Yugoslavia. Atalanta was a naval operation deployed to deter, prevent, and repress acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast. Moreover, in general, these EU operations were low-risk (with the exception of Artemis) because deployment occurred in permissive environments (Fiott 2020), i.e., in places "in which friendly forces anticipate[d] no obstructions to, or interference with, operations" (UK 2017, 8). They also benefitted from only modest budgets (with the exception of EUFOR Chad/CAR).

Table 1: Phase I Operations

Operation / Mission	Period	Geographic Area	Mandate	Duration (Months)*	Type	Size (total)*	Risk	Common costs*
CONCORDIA	2003	Western Balkans (FYROM)	Implementation of agreement (Limited executive tasks)	9	Post conflict stabilization	Small - 400	Low	Low € 4.7 million
ARTEMIS/DRC	2003	Subsahara DRC (Bunia)	Stabilization	2	Peacekeeping	Intermediate -1,807	High	Low € 7 million
ALTHEA/BiH	2004- now	Western Balkans (BiH)	Implementation of agreement	193	Post conflict stabilization	Large (7,000) Intermediate (2,500 in 2007)	Low	Intermediate € 81.8 million
EUFOR DR Congo	2006	Subsahara DRC (Kinshasa)	Stabilization (Support response to violence)	4	Peacekeeping	Intermediate -2,259	Low	Low € 16.7 million
EUFOR Chad/ RCA	2008-2009	Subsahara East Chad/ Northeast CAR	PoC Deliver humanitarian aid	12	Peacekeeping	Intermediate -3,300	Intermediate	High € 99.2 million
EU NAVFOR - Atalanta	2008 – now	Horn of Africa	Fight against piracy	145	Combat piracy	Intermediate -1,943	Low	Intermediate € 59.6 million

Source: The author based on Di Mauro et al. 2017 and EEAS 2021a. * All data until 2020.

The narrative of the EU about these operations further reinforced the Union's positive outlook about these five years of improvement in terms of its capacity to manage conflicts. Furthermore, the EU's hybrid intervention format that combines military and civilian actions would become a model for other regionally led peace operations (see Hardt 2009). The ambition that characterizes Phase I was echoed in the 2007 Constitutional Treaty that expanded the Petersberg tasks by including operations such as joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue interventions, military advice and assistance, conflict prevention and peace-keeping, and the deployment of combat forces in crisis management. All these facets of intervention were seen as contributing "to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories" (EU 2007, article 28 B). Moreover, a solidarity clause prescribed the obligation for member states to provide "aid and assistance by all the means in their power" when any "member state is the victim of armed aggression on its territory" (EU 2007, article 28A.7).

In spite of the positive outlook, examining EU operations more closely reveals that certain of these interventions were conducted to test or prove the EU's capacity to act autonomously, while others were understood as the prerogative of individual member states (Gegout 2005; Griffin 2007). "Cosmetic operations," such as EUFOR DRC (Haine and Giegerich 2006), or "bridge operations" were those connected to more complex operations such as EUFOR Chad/CAR (Tardy 2015b). Another set of operations were presented as being part of an effort to simply support UN operations on the ground (e.g., Artemis and EUFOR Congo). Certain operations such as Artemis and EUFOR RDC did not unveil much about the Union's capacity to act as a global security provider, as they "did not demonstrate any major advances in EU military capacities for active engagement" (Griffin 2007, 40). In these cases, political expectations did not match the capacity of the military forces deployed, nor the range of obstacles on the ground (Murphy 2011). Since complex systems can absorb and adapt to adverse situations, these shortcomings led the EU to adjust so it could retain its goals, structures, and functions regarding military operations and missions. This adjustment came in the shape of contraction.

Phase II (2010-2016): Contracting to Adapt to Reality

The second phase (2010-2016) covers the duration of Catherine Ashton's term (December 2009 – October 2014) and part of Federica Mogherini's term (November 2014 – November 2019) as the function of High Representative. During that time, the EU sought to enhance its ability to deploy joint forces when and where necessary; to that effect, European countries committed themselves alongside NATO operations (in Afghanistan, for instance) and *ad hoc* coalitions (for example, in Iraq). These involvements diverted resources and attention away from the CSDP (Engberg 2021). Furthermore, the 2008 financial crisis led several nations to implement cost-cutting measures that restricted the overall operational capability of the armed forces and

contributed to the decision by member states to adopt a lower profile on security and defense issues at the EU level (Moser 2015).

Within the EU, security and defense policy rests quasi-exclusively with member states, and the decision to get involved (or not) in military operations is made by governments according to national perceptions and interests (see Youngs 2008; Moser 2015). For example, EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EUNAVFOR Sophia occurred because the former was aimed at fighting pirates who threatened European trading interests in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden and the latter addressed the migrant crisis that impacted European countries at the time (European Parliament 2020). During that period, there was constant divergences among the "big three" (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) regarding preferences and priorities in military engagement (see Howorth 2003; Longhurst and Miskimmon 2007; Wagnsson 2010). Tensions also emerged among member states because some pushed for large-scale, sophisticated operations (e.g., France) and others were reticent to use military force at all (e.g., Germany and Scandinavian countries) (Moser 2015), supported EU autonomy, or were more inclined towards NATO intervention rather than EU involvement (Engberg 2021). Moreover, initial military objectives encompassed in the Helsinki Headline Goal failed, in spite of a new deadline being set to 2010 (Engberg 2021). In 2007, Solana emphasized that a rapidly deployable force—the Battlegroup—was "not just a concept but already a reality" and that it was necessary to develop the capacity "to act quickly and robustly where needed" (Solana 2007). However, the Battlegroup was never deployed and was consequently reduced to a third of what was originally planned (Whitman and Wolff 2012).

During Phase I, even with the initial impetus and optimistic narrative, the EU had faced tensions and shortcomings, which led it to adapt in Phase II, during which EU military engagement contracted in practice. Although six new operations and missions were deployed between 2010 and 2016, an important shift occurred. Indeed, most of these interventions involved non-executive mandates and focused on training, monitoring, mentoring, and advising. They also minimized risks and costs since only the EUFOR RCA in the Central African Republic and the maritime operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Sophia) functioned under executive mandates, which means that they took over for the host nations. While they were both directed at African territories (the sub-Saharan region, the Horn of Africa, and Central Africa), EUFOR RCA aimed at stabilizing a conflict and EUNAVFOR Sophia targeted human smuggling and trafficking. Table 2 shows that the missions conducted during Phase II tended to last longer than Phase I operations but were quite more limited in scope. Only EUNAVFOR Sophia operated with more than a thousand troops. Even the Althea operation, still on-going in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was reduced to 600 troops in 2012 (Keil and Perry 2015). Moreover, budgets remained modest—with the exception of the support allocated to EUTM-Mali—and the operations and missions ran in permissive and low risk environments.

Table 2 – Phase II Operations

Operation / Mission	Period	Geographic Area	Mandate	Duration (Months)*	Type	Size (total)*	Risk	Common costs*
EUTM Somalia	2010 – now	Horn of Africa	Training Non executive	119	Post conflict stabilization	Small - 125	Low	Intermediate € 60.9 million
EUTM-Mali	2013 – 2024	Subsahara – Mali	Training Non executive	95	Post conflict stabilization	Small - 570	Low	High € 105.9 million
EUFOR RCA	2014 – 2015	Subsahara – CAR (Bangui)	Stabilization	12	Peacekeeping	Small – 700	Intermediate	Low € 30.6 million
EUMAM RCA	2015 – 2016	Subsahara – CAR	Advisory and training Non executive	16	Post conflict stabilization	Small – 70	Low	Low € 7.9 million
EUNAVFOR MED - Sophia	2015 – 2020	Mediterranean Libya	Fight against human smuggling/ traffic	66	Combat human traffic	Intermediate 1,666	Low	Low € 18.9 million
EUTM RCA	2016 - now	Subsahara – CAR	Advisory and training Non executive	54	Post conflict stabilization	Small - 170	Low	Low € 43.6 million

Source: The author based on Di Mauro et al. 2017 and EEAS 2021a. * All data until 2020.

The ambition of the EU for activism in military deployment did not last much longer than the duration of Phase I. In fact, during that time, actions were generally *ad hoc* and tentative, and they met strategic objectives with difficulty (Coelmont 2012). Moreover, after "brisk activity in the Solana era, the [CSDP] almost came to a standstill" (Moser 2015, 12). During Phase I, the EU had failed to accomplish its military goals, leading people to perceive its external actions (military and civilian missions and operations and diplomatic activities) as isolated and uncoordinated. Phase II inherited these shortcomings. High Representative Catherine Ashton stated that it was "not enough to chase and deter pirates, not enough to try and do development when there is no security, not enough to try and provide economic support without a stable government." Consequently, it became necessary for the EU to adopt a comprehensive approach (EEAS 2012) to recover from adversity and retain its original intention of becoming a global security provider. Therefore, during Phase II, military missions were prioritized over operations and the strategy shifted toward a "comprehensive approach." As a result, new military strategies were launched in 2011 in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, and in 2012 an EU inter-institutional working group was established to develop this approach and solve the consistent problem posed by isolated initiatives.

Thus, during Phase II, the EU attempted to adjust its responses to the same external and internal shifts and challenges that it had faced during Phase I. It also injected consistency across its external military action. However, the Union missed opportunities to act coherently on several occasions, for example in the crises that followed the Arab Spring in Libya and Syria. Lack of consensus to the possible launch of a civilian mission or military operation resulted in non-response from the EU. In Libya, for example, some EU member states opted to act under the NATO framework (Moser 2015). Moreover, the fact that the French government failed to incite EU forces to participate in counterterrorism operations in the Sahel in 2013 (Engberg 2021) showed how difficult it was to get support from member states for substantial deployments. Consequently, Ashton favored a comprehensive approach that combined "elements of foreign policy (diplomacy, trade, aid and military and non-military instruments) and clearly prefer[red] conflict prevention over armed intervention" (Moser 2015, 13). Her stance, however, would not be taken up by her successor, Federica Mogherini, who instead worked on yet a new strategy. In 2016, the EU Global Strategy report (Merket 2015) was published and opened another adjustment phase.

Phase III (2017-Today): Adjusting to a Changing Global (Dis)order

The third phase has included the half-term of Federica Mogherini (2017 – November 2019) and Josep Borrell's current term (December 2019 – today) in the role of High Representative. In Phase III, there has been a lack of consensus about objectives, principles, and methods among member states, which have not all been willing to participate in military interventions. This lack of consensus has led the international standing of the EU to deteriorate. Moreover, increased instability in

Africa and the Middle East has created security problems for Europe (e.g., terrorist attacks on European soil and the migration crisis) and emphasized the importance of border security. In addition, Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014 indicated EU's difficulty in dealing with conflicts outside its strict borders. These new circumstances gave rise to a new era of adaptation for the EU. Indeed, the 2016 EU Global Strategy and Council Conclusions on Security and Defense (Council of the EU 2016) opened a new phase of adjustment in which the EU attempted to redefine its military ambition of being an independent actor in security and defense. Thus, the EU Global Strategy set three overarching aims for EU action. It was advanced that first, the EU must respond to external conflicts and crises. Second, it must build the capability and capacity of its external partners. And third, it is expected to protect itself and its citizens (EU 2016).

The discourse has also been adapted. As the euphoria exhibited in Phase I waned, the idea of unprecedented peace, prosperity, democracy, and absence of war came under question (Engberg 2021). At the same time, Europe's external context showed that the EU would not keep contracting its security and defense action as it had done during Phase II. In fact, the EU Global Strategy states that "an appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders" (EU 2016, 9). This assertion resulted from the understanding that the security environment had deteriorated so much that the Union had to make stronger efforts to defend its territory and citizens. Phase III thus has reinforced this necessity through a significant shift of power distribution in a global order that had become multipolar and was undermined by Russia, China, and the Trump first presidency in the US, as well as the United Kingdom's decision to leave the Union. The new discourse emphasized the EU's need for a "credible, cooperative and reliable power" (Mogherini 2017). Warning that Europe was standing "on the edge of a precipice" and should "wake up" in order to think "itself strategically as a geopolitical power," French president Emmanuel Macron insisted that European countries could "no longer rely on America to defend NATO allies" (The Economist 2019). Hence, in order to resist adverse conditions and retain its original goals, the EU has responded by transforming itself along a new trajectory. In practice, what this means is that during Phase III the EU has broadened its ambition beyond crisis management and capacity building to include hybrid threats, cybersecurity, and border management, among other new facets of intervention (Council of the EU 2016). To achieve these objectives, EU officials reviewed the EU Requirements Catalogue**,** establishing the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and creating new instruments such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the EU's Co-ordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD), the European Defense Fund (EDF), and the Strategic Compass process. These new instruments seek to consolidate the European security and defense architecture by enhancing the Union's capabilities for joint planning, development, procurement, and operational, while also fostering a defense industrial base.

In terms of military engagement overseas during the adjustment process of Phase III, the EU has remained involved in five ongoing military operations and missions.

Only one new maritime operation (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI) was deployed in the Mediterranean, in replacement of EUNAVFOR Sophia. With the exception of EUFOR Althea, all Phase III operations and missions have focused on Africa. Furthermore, as Table 3 demonstrates, these mostly small-scale operations (with the exception of EUNAVFOR Atalanta) have ran in a permissive environment and relied on modest or intermediate-size budgets (with the exception of EUTM-Mali). In 2020, six military operations and missions (EEAS 2021a) went on, among which only naval operations had an executive mandate.

Table 3: Phase III Operations

Operation / Mission	Period	Geographic Area	Mandate	Size (total)*	Risk	Common costs*
EUNAVFOR MED - IRINI	2020 - now	Mediterranean Libya	Implement UNSC arms embargo against Libya	Small - 600	Low	Low € 837,800 (initial)
EUTM RCA	2016 - now	Subsahara – RCA	Advisory and training Non executive	Small - 170	Low	Low € 43.6 million
EUTM-Mali	2013 – 2024	Subsahara – Mali	Training Non executive	Small - 570	Low	High € 105.9 million
EUTM Somalia	2010 – now	Horn of Africa	Training Non executive	Small - 125	Low	Intermediate € 60.9 million
EU NAVFOR - Atalanta	2008 – now	Horn of Africa	Fight against piracy	Intermediate -1,943	Low	Intermediate € 59.6 million
ALTHEA/BiH	2004- now	Western Balkans (BiH)	Implementation of agreement	Small - 600	Low	Intermediate € 81.8 million

Source: The author based on Di Mauro et al. 2017 and EEAS 2020, 2021a. * All data until 2020.

At the time of writing, this last adjustment phase is ongoing, and the EU is facing more challenges than it has made achievements. Unfortunately, its new instruments (PESCO, CARD, EDF, and the Strategic Compass) have not yet led "to any tangible shift in the Union's capability base or readiness for deployment" (Fiott 2020, 3). Brexit in particular has created a new challenge for future EU military engagement overseas. The UK had been one of the most important providers of economic and military resources within the EU, so that its exit from the Union enhanced the role of France and Germany in decisions about military operations. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have defied the capacity of the EU to accelerate military activity and achieve the level of ambition set out by the EU Global Strategy. The adjustment has seemingly been moving towards a prioritization of internal defense over international security. In

this sense, the low profile of military operations and missions likely will remain. However, the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which was launched in April 2021, acknowledged the importance of a meaningful European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific in the future, among other objectives in security and defense (EEAS 2021b). The Strategy sets out priority areas for cooperation including in security and defense. Concrete actions have included joint naval exercises conducted by EUNAVFOR Atalanta with partners, the launch of EUTM-Mozambique, a coordinated maritime presence in the North-West Indian Ocean, and EU-funded thematic projects with a regional outreach in maritime information, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security, and crisis management, among other foci (EEAS 2024c). This regional presence indicates that high-profile overseas military operations are still a priority. Whereas EU leaders had been thinking about how to resolve the ambiguity of EU military operations, a new and shocking event posed new challenges.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in February 2022 alarmed the EU, especially because it happened at a moment when Europe was grappling with limited military capabilities, a lack of technological innovation, and an inadequate defense industrial base (Polyakova et al. 2023). Through the Versailles Declaration of March 2022, EU member states decided to reinforce the EU's defense capabilities and significantly increase defense spending. They also agreed on greater investment in the capabilities necessary to conduct a full range of missions and operations (EU 2022). High Representative Joseph Borrell reinforced the need for the renaissance of the European defense industry, which is not adequately prepared to meet the challenges of the Ukraine war (EEAS 2024d). The dark scenario of insecurity and geostrategic competition will surely further strain the Union, especially in high-politics fields, such as security and defense. On the one hand, the war in Ukraine could foster EU solidarity and push the bloc beyond intergovernmentalism and toward a deep defense integration. On the other hand, the respective postures of Russia and the EU in the current crises could also encourage individualistic decisions by member states on certain issues, such as domestic defense expenditure and military capabilities.

The EU has shown to be reactive in its foreign and security policy (Riddervold and Cross 2019). The Russian aggression on Ukraine may lead to new policy developments in response to the crisis. The Strategic Compass approved in 2022, only a few weeks after the Russian invasion constitutes an ambitious plan to strengthen the EU's security and defense policy by 2030. It aims to improve the EU's ability to act decisively in crises and transform the bloc into a more capable security provider (EEAS 2024b). The war in Ukraine has instilled further urgency into these efforts, and the EU has swiftly implemented many of the goals set in its 2024 strategic plan (EEAS 2024a). By adopting a more inward gaze in terms of defense, the EU would make military operations and missions a secondary priority. Thus, the war in Ukraine could be a turning point and inaugurate a new phase of EU military engagement outside or on the margins of Europe.

Adapting to New Trajectories

Since 1999, the EU has made notable efforts to improve its military capabilities in reaction to crises and has shown the rest of the world its willingness to become an influential global security provider. Consequently, the Union has developed its capacity to carry out military operations and missions through different rounds of initiatives. But, in spite of some positive results, discrepancies have arisen between the goals of the EU and its concrete action. Although member states generally exhibit significant collective economic power and military capabilities, the absolute weight of the EU in international security remains weak and the impact of its operations and missions on the ground has been marginal. Looking at EU practices of military engagement overseas through the complexity theory helps delineate the EU's adaptive approach. Changes in the international system and internal environment in the aftermath of the Cold War led the Union to advance normatively and structurally as to launch several military operations in the Solana era. But the actions of the EU during this ambitious phase and the internal and external environments at the time resulted in a contraction phase (2010-2016) that allowed the Union to keep its military operations and missions running while also rendering its external actions more coherent. The contraction provoked debates about the Union's actual capacity to accomplish the goals it previously envisioned, as well as about the behavior it should adopt to adapt to the shifts of an increasingly complex world.

EU leaders learned from past experiences and were able to adjust by creating new ambitions and instruments for the EU to remedy the problems it had faced in previous phases and to seek solutions to emerging challenges. During the last two decades, decisions to engage in military operations and missions were led by an adaptive approach, which transformed the EU. New domains of stability were created, and the EU took a new trajectory to retain its initial aim of being a relevant security provider. Until today, EU military engagement has not reached the level that was initially expected, at least in the eyes of the public situated outside Europe. But the shortcomings should not necessarily trigger pessimism. In fact, the complexity theory allows for an optimistic perspective on the future since it indicates that contingent events bring about opportunities for developing new strategies, structures, skills, and norms (see Kavalski 2015). In terms of security and defense, optimism becomes even more necessary in light of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Remembering Jean Monnet's assertions that Europe was "built up through crises" and that "it would be the sum of the solutions brought to these crises" (Commission of the European Communities 1989), the EU is certainly likely to continue to resist, evolve, and adapt. As the world becomes ever more complex, the EU will keep transforming its military operations and missions in the face of new challenges.

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