



Security through democracy: Between aspiration and pretence

RICHARD YOUNGS

About FRIDE

FRIDE is an independent think-tank based in Madrid, focused on issues related to democracy and human rights; peace and security; and humanitarian action and development. FRIDE attempts to influence policy-making and inform public opinion, through its research in these areas.

Working Papers

FRIDE's working papers seek to stimulate wider debate on these issues and present policy-relevant considerations.

Security through democracy: Between aspiration and pretence*

RICHARD YOUNGS

Director General of FRIDE, and Associate Professor
at the University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

© Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) 2010.

Goya, 5-7, Pasaje 2º. 28001 Madrid – SPAIN

Tel.: +34 912 44 47 40 – Fax: +34 912 44 47 41

Email: fride@fride.org

All FRIDE publications are available at the FRIDE website: www.fride.org

This document is the property of FRIDE. If you would like to copy, reprint or in any way reproduce all or any part, you must request permission. The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the opinion of FRIDE. If you have any comments on this document or any other suggestions, please email us at fride@fride.org

ISSN: 2172-5829 (Print)

ISSN: 2172-5837 (Online)

Legal Deposit: M-45320-2010

»» Contents

Inter-state relations: integrative versus democratic dynamics	2
'Single issue' syndrome	5
Counter-terrorism and deradicalisation	7
Conflict	9
Conclusion	12

>> The EU has constructed an impressively comprehensive edifice predicated on a singular line of reasoning: politics matter to security. At a myriad of levels and within a plethora of different component parts of security policy, the EU asserts that political trends and structures within third countries have an impact on Europe's own security. And the formal line runs that it is democratic politics that are best sought in pursuit of security.

In theory, democracy is diplomacy's multi-purpose tool, with a logic for each predicament: democracy is the means of smoothing relations with antagonist governments; it is the route to deradicalising terrorists and insurgents within states; it is the way to cement peace deals in civil conflict; it is the remedy to a host of soft security challenges, including migration, economic security and the need for greater transparency in energy supplies.

Democracy provides the political foundation necessary to sustaining all other dimensions of security. It is the bedrock judged necessary to the success of 'mainstream' security strategies. Without democracy advancing and stabilising beyond Europe, Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, defence capabilities initiatives, counter-surveillance and external military cooperation are all likely to stumble on the stony ground of political obstacles. EU High Representative Catherine Ashton has described the concern with human rights and democracy as the 'silver thread' running through the whole gamut of EU external strategic policy.

Or at least, that is the contention. The reality is less straightforward. Few will be taken aback by the observation that the EU has not fully lived up to its commitments to support worldwide democracy. But also pertinent is the way in which the conceptual relationship between democracy and security is understood. Of course, it is well known that there are two extremes in this debate: traditional *realpolitik* sees security and liberal values as being mutually exclusive foreign policy choices; in diametric contrast, the liberal internationalist position is that democratic ideals and self-interest go hand in hand. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most EU policy is positioned somewhere between these two extremes.

>>>

The conviction is well-rooted amongst policy-makers that a more democratic world would in very broad terms be a more peaceable and prosperous one. Undoubtedly, democracy has extended roots into the European security psyche. But the logic is not quite one of ‘security through democracy’. Rather, it might best be captured as: ‘security alongside democracy, when other conditions are fulfilled’. Many accounts point to the way that immediate security interests discourage democracy promotion. This should hardly surprise us; nor is it especially noteworthy. The issue of greater significance is that even where one detects good logic for the EU to be interested in fostering a wider sphere of democracy over the longer-term, its policies do not appear to be driven in any priority sense by a conviction that changes in political process contribute to good geostrategy.

This working paper is not about whether supporting democracy is a good thing or not. Suffice it to say that lively academic debate persists over democracy’s security-enhancing worth. In each area of security concern – interstate relations, soft security, counter-terrorism, conflict resolution – democracy’s value is asserted robustly by many, but also increasingly questioned by other analysts. This working paper provides a broad-brush overview of how we might classify the EU’s approach towards the security-democracy link, and reflects on how this impacts on the broad panoply of traditional security initiatives.

Inter-state relations: integrative versus democratic dynamics

»» The security-democracy nexus can be broken down into four different strategic logics. The first proposition is that the EU is likely to be able to establish more peaceable relations with democratic than with autocratic regimes. Security aims are more likely to be achieved with states whose governments are open, accountable, predictable and transparent. This is, of course, the essence of the democratic peace theory; this is much debated but of abiding influence over security thinking.

The EU may indeed prefer that democracy prevail in those states presenting Europe with its thorniest strategic challenges. But policy focuses on other means of addressing those challenges, with democracy an apparently marginally-contributing long-term goal. Democracy is not prioritised as the means of improving relations with other powers. It is supported as and when security aims in inter-state relations allow it. It is not completely absent from the EU security equation; but it is a residual, not geostrategy’s core driver.

With ‘states of concern’, the policy is to integrate non-democratic regimes into inter-dependent processes and structures that constrain their behaviour. It is about ‘locking them in’ rather than pressing democratic reform. Interdependence is seen as a more potent security driver than democratisation. This can be seen in the cases of China and

Russia. In the case of the former, the strategic logic appears, if almost by default, to be one of commercial lock-in; in the case of the latter, a more political lock-in.

Recent deliberation over policy towards Russia has centred on president Medvedev's proposal for a new European security pact. European governments have responded cautiously to these proposals, grappling with the question of how best to improve relations with Moscow. Most governments are not convinced that new institutional structures would be appropriate, but have declared themselves favourable towards the idea of reconstituting a security partnership with Russia on modified terms. There seems broad agreement that the question of Russian democracy today merits little priority policy focus. The Medvedev pact would row back from the Helsinki Accords' inclusion of human rights commitments. It is essentially about state-to-state hard security cooperation. European governments may be reluctant to agree a thorough-going change to formal institutional structures, but they appear to concur with the Russian vision of a return to more traditional inter-state diplomacy.

Many EU diplomats are positively disposed towards the notion of integrating Russia into a genuinely pan-European security architecture as a means of counter-balancing Asia's rising powers. While the EU insists that it does not buy into Russia's spheres of influence argument, the actions of several member states suggest that they do have increasing sympathy with just such thinking. They have ceded a dilution of OSCE pro-democracy actions and withdrawn their support for using NATO enlargement as an incentive to democratic reform. The EU and Russia are now exploring the possibility of undertaking joint peacekeeping missions together. At the end of June 2010 Angela Merkel teamed up with president Medvedev to propose a new EU-Russia security council. Putting flesh on the bones of this idea, in October 2010 the French and German governments proposed a new EU-Russian Political and Security Committee.

After the Russia-Georgia conflict of 2008, the focus on democracy was reduced in both these countries. For one group of EU member states, the concern after the Russian invasion of South Ossetia was not to risk undermining Georgian national unity by pressing president Mikhail Saakashvili hard to reign in his semi-authoritarian peccadilloes. Georgia received a huge injection of donor funding after 2008, just as Saakashvili's administration changed its rallying call from democratisation to 'modernisation' and the president introduced reforms many saw as paving his way into a powerful prime-ministerial office after the end of his term in 2012. For another group of states, the lesson drawn from the conflict was the need to engage Russia on early warning mechanisms and regional cooperation, entailing an even further sidelining of criticism over Russia's internal political trends. The European Union Monitoring Mission almost seems to be policing the post-invasion borders on Russia's behalf, stopping Georgian incursions into South Ossetia while Russia denies it access to the enclave. EU officials say that their stress is on the humanitarian dimension and maintaining strict operational neutrality, rather than the mission getting 'dragged into' things like civil society support.

There are important and valid reasons for resurrecting such cooperation with Russia, after a period of prickly tension between Moscow and several European governments. But what is of relevance here is that there is little evidence that current security policy debates are driven by a concern to see Russia return to the path of democratisation. The focus is on discussing a whole range of potential new means of practical cooperation with Russia. The EU perceives Russia as a necessary partner for key immediate global and regional security aims. An EU-Russia Modernisation Partnership has been agreed that does formally include a focus on the rule of law. But the centre of gravity in EU

policy has shifted towards assuaging Russia's feeling of victimisation, and away from the desirability of its democratisation.¹ Most think-tank advocacy now pushes in the same direction, recommending collective EU-Russian problem-solving and greater 'accommodation' with Russia's de-democratisation.²

In the case of China, European security has been clearly led by a commercial logic – and some might feel, indeed, emasculated by economics. China might be conceived of as today's most vital laboratory for a test of the democratic peace hypothesis. Its results are less than conclusive. European diplomats may be genuine in their assertions that over the longer term a more democratic China would be preferable. But this is not a desire that informs today's policy decisions in any tangible manner.

The predominant view is that China's power means that it is hardly worth trying to support democracy in this case; that the chance of making any impact is so slim that there is far more to lose than to gain from attempting to prompt a loosening of the Chinese communist party's political control. European efforts to support reform in China are weakening. Support for village elections has been discontinued. The EU-China Legal and Judicial Cooperation Programme limits itself to the issues of commercial law that are of direct interest to European investors. A number of European NGOs have even been excluded from the EU-China human rights dialogue. European governments have been reluctant to criticise repression against the Uighur Muslim minority; they stay clear of the Charter 08 pro-democracy movement; and all now formally recognise Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. The EU arms embargo has not prevented increased weapons sales to China. The Chinese leadership has cancelled summits and meetings with European governments without sanction.³

China appears to disprove one of the central pillars of the democratic peace, namely that democracy works well in security terms because it generally spurs economic interdependence. In China's case, of course, political reform has not been necessary to tie the People's Republic into mutual dependency with Western economies – seen in heightened form in the context of the current economic crisis. What is striking is that EU policy is led very much by trade and commercial concerns, with a rather easily-made assumption that as much economic lock-in that can be achieved, the better for security. The erstwhile support for China's accession to the World Trade Organisation – and this body's plethora of limiting rules – can be seen as the epitome of such reasoning. One expert detects here 'an overly-expansive Commission-led agenda', largely bereft of political focus.⁴ What is lacking is any far-reaching strategising on how China's internal politics relates to such policy trends.

Additionally, beyond its great power diplomacy, the EU pursues many policies of counterbalancing. While these entail deepening partnerships with some notable middle-ranking democracies, such as Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and South Korea, they also propel strategic alliance-building with a range of dictatorships. In broad terms, the EU has re-

1. For an overview of current European debates on the Medvedev proposals, see J. Vaquer, 'Focusing back on European security again: The Medvedev proposal as an opportunity' (Barcelona: CIDOB Documents, July 2010).

2. For one recent example, see I. Krastev and M. Leonard, 'The spectre of a multipolar Europe' (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

3. House of Lords, European Union Committee, 'Stars and dragons: the EU and China', 7th Report of Session 2009–10 (London: House of Lords, March 2010), p. 20.

4. A. Small, 'Beijing is worth a missed dinner – Lady Ashton goes to China', GMF commentary, 2 September 2010, <http://blog.gmfus.org/2010/09/02/beijing-is-worth-a-missed-dinner%e2%80%94lady-ashton-goes-to-china/>

jected the notion of geostrategy being based on an alliance of democracies. It might be felt that this is a wise judgement. But it has also gone hand-in-hand with a dilution of European contributions to consolidating new democracies that might be expected to be more strategically significant in the future. Not only is the EU sceptical about getting emerging democracies signed up to multilateral democracy promotion, but it is pulling back in its own democracy-support efforts as part of a strategic logic that accords such powers a more leading role in their own respective regions.

Of course, in all this there may be an undeclared, hyper-Machiavellian, well-worked strategy of keeping 'rival powers' weak by actively seeking to deprive them of high quality consolidated democracy. More probably, the concern must be that the EU is simply failing to look long-term. Many would predict that over the longer-term dangers may lie in the possible fragmentation of states such as Russia and China and the prospect of nationalistic-expansionism in a second tier group of emerging powers that may prove to be the states of most serious concern by mid-century. It is unlikely that pure alliance-building will suffice to temper such concerns.

'Single issue' syndrome

»» Such are the policy balances at play in the EU's general strategising towards important powers. But what about the approach towards more specific policy issues? This represents the second strategic logic, which holds that democracy should help sustain diplomatic gains made in relation to particular short-term security objectives. The evidence suggests that, in practice, in dealing with individual issues of concern the EU's policy is to negotiate trade-offs and deals on the particular matter in question in a way that deliberately keeps the democracy agenda separate. The EU suffers from what might be called 'single issue syndrome'.

Several illustrative examples of this malady can be mentioned. One is policy towards the Iranian nuclear programme. The EU's position has been that the nuclear and democracy issues should be kept separate. Iran's democratisation is certainly a genuinely held European aspiration. But while talks over the nuclear issue proceed, the main concern has been that pressure on the regime for human rights improvements will make it feel more threatened and thus more determined to proceed with its nuclear programme. The EU-Iran human rights dialogue was effectively wound up in 2004. Many new carrots have been put on the table, including promises of aid, trade preferences and all kinds of social exchanges, as an incentive for Iran to relent on its nuclear programme. But these have not been linked to resumed cooperation on human rights.

Diplomats are invariably minded to point out that Iran's opposition forces also defend the Islamic Republic's right to develop nuclear capabilities. This appears to be a more potent influence over policy than the fact that the opposition has called for more harmony and flexibility in the way that Iran manages its relations with the West. The trade-off between

the democracy and nuclear agendas has become more apparent since Iran's 2009 elections. As protests have raged in Iran since these elections the EU has offered an implicit trade-off: no pressure on a reeling Iranian regime in return for the latter compromising on its nuclear programme. The EU did not even extend its list of visa bans on Iranian officials after the violence of 2009. Policy-makers admit to a lack of deep reflection on how complex the relationship is between Iran's internal political trends and the prospects of a satisfactory nuclear deal.

Another case of 'single issue syndrome' relates to the security impact of climate change. Many European diplomats are entirely candid in arguing that pressure on human rights and peace-building is and will be foregone in order to get the maximum number of countries signed up to internationally-agreed climate change commitments. Indeed, some even argue that democratisation in many developing states would make it harder for regimes to make the concessions necessary to cut carbon emissions.⁵ The growing feeling that liberal democracy is irrelevant to these kind of existential problems may herald a return to elitist visions of technocratic experts running the international system.

A further example is the parcelled up approach to energy security. The EU espouses an approach to energy security based on rules-based governance norms. Not only in its immediate periphery but further afield too, the EU seeks to export its own internal energy market rules that touch upon a whole host of good governance standards. In practice, energy questions and deliberation on democracy support are simply not linked up within EU policy-making. This is not simply a matter of pointing to the obvious fact that energy deals are done with autocrats. It relates also to the way in which the EU conceives the relationship between economic and political power. In several countries, such as Russia and Iran, it is clear that the conjoining of economic and political power causes profound problems for energy security. Yet the main thrust of EU policy limits itself to improving governance standards in other countries' energy sectors in a way that is ring-fenced from systemic-level political problems and considerations.⁶

Finally, the management of migration. Most European politicians would rank migration, especially illegal or irregular flows of people into Europe, as representing a more immediate 'security threat' than traditional, 'hard' strategic questions. European policy documents insist that support for more open politics in developing states is a central pillar of immigration-reducing strategy. In practice, it is not. Offered with a choice between spending 100 million euros on a democracy initiative or on measures to boost physical controls on migration flows, few European politicians would have the long-term foresight to plump for the former. Democratisation is, if anything, feared as a possible trigger of greater, not reduced, illegal migration. Southern European states frequently make the argument that they have to be more cautious about political reform in North Africa because they receive more migrants from this region than do northern EU member states. If they were true to EU rhetoric, their geographical proximity to North Africa should give them greater, not lesser, reason to see democracy prevail in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. In October 2010 the EU granted the Libyan government an extra 50 million euros to beef up the

5. D. Shearman and J. W. Smith, *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007).

6. R. Youngs, *Energy Security: Europe's New Foreign Policy Challenge* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 178-180.

country's border controls and surveillance technology, and stem migration into Europe. Colonel Qadafi requested such payment as a means, in his delicate and delightful phraseology, to ward off the instability of a 'black Europe'. European leaders seem more mindful of this 'security' threat than they are of anything emanating from Qadafi's brutal repression of his own population.

Counter-terrorism and deradicalisation

»» The third logic: since the mid-1990s, the EU has espoused the notion that democratic reform is the best means of tempering the radicalisation that underpins international terrorism. While this strategic logic was invested with greater commitment and urgency in light of the terrorist attacks in Washington, Madrid and London, it is now losing force as a driver of EU security policy. It was always unduly simplistic to paint democracy as a panacea for deradicalisation; but now the pendulum appears to have swung back to the other extreme where democracy support in the Middle East and South Asia is seen as either irrelevant or in some instances prejudicial to effective counter-terrorism.

Several European governments do fund a smattering of initiatives that link human rights to counter-terrorism (CT). The UK has funded local human rights organisations to monitor security services' treatment of terrorist suspects in Jordan. Several European governments fund rule of law programmes in the tribally administered areas of Pakistan. But such initiatives are relatively few in number and of limited scale. Their aim is not so much to support those seeking fundamentally different types of political system in the Middle East and Asia, but more modestly to include some degree of focus on human rights within beefed-up state-to-state counter-terrorist cooperation.

The 'reformist' strand in European policy is generally equated with exporting and fostering 'moderation'. This is entirely laudable but is not synonymous with – nor does it necessarily involve – supporting democratisation. European governments run programmes on training moderate imams; but they do little to break the links through which authoritarian regimes promote more radical imams to senior positions. Dialogue forums and initiatives such as the Ana Lindh Foundation and the Alliance of Civilisations carry out much admirable work but have declined to build a focus on democracy into their funding initiatives. Muslims complain that such initiatives are not designed to talk about human rights on the basis of a common Europeanness, but rather entail Christian or secular majorities using human rights discourse as a means of restraining Muslim identity. Such approaches conflate and confuse CT and the challenges of integration.

EU positions towards political Islam have evolved. But the increasing vibrancy and professionalism of Islamist opposition forces across the Middle East is judged to be a reason for

putting the brakes on support for democracy, more than it is seen as an opportunity for fostering effective alternatives to autocratic regimes. European rhetoric now routinely insists that Islamists must play a full political role. Yet, Islamists are still excluded from European support programmes and the EU declines to defend Islamists rounded up by the security forces of authoritarian regimes. Despite plentiful rhetoric to the contrary, European governments still adhere to a nervous and static view of political Islam: they focus on what short run negative effects might occur if democracy allowed Islamist parties to assume power far more than on how democratic process might over time contribute to encouraging moderation.

European governments have extended support and cooperation to countries such as Pakistan, Algeria and Egypt to boost border controls and surveillance measures. Vastly increased amounts of weapons are now channelled from Europe to the security forces of these countries in the name of cooperation on counter-terrorism. One commentator argues that the internal-external link in CT policy is seen most clearly in member states such as the UK exporting their own new surveillance technology to dictatorial regimes in the Middle East and Asia.⁷ The British Parliament's Human Rights Committee has expressed concerns over the depth of UK security cooperation in particular with Pakistani and Saudi Arabian security services sitting uneasily with rights commitments in these countries.⁸ The European Parliament regularly criticises the use of EU development aid for equipping non-European security forces. A counter-terrorism clause now competes with the democracy clause within EU external agreements. With 'ally' regimes the policy is to equip and train rather than chivvy elites into allowing democratic reform.

EU governments have to date agreed three major packages of counter-terrorist measures that all focus primarily on strengthening law enforcement and monitoring measures. These formal counter-terrorist strategies mention the importance of supporting reform outside the Union, but are bereft of concrete initiatives designed to contribute to this end. Budgets for beefing up 'homeland' defences vastly exceed those projecting European reform and counter-radicalisation efforts outwards. Only a small proportion of the resources made available under Contest 2, the UK's Counter-Terrorism strategy introduced in March 2009, are allocated for counter-radicalisation activities outside Europe.⁹ Deradicalisation initiatives have proliferated mainly *within* the EU's own borders, particularly in the UK, Spain and France. Counter-terrorist policy within Europe is gradually assuming a more forward-looking focus on the roots of radicalisation, and some of the more draconian civil rights restrictions introduced in the early 2000s are being repealed. Paradoxically, if there is a shift in *external* policy it is if anything in the opposite direction.

The foreign policy input to the counter-terrorism dossier remains limited. In mid-2010 a new EU committee was created comprising member state representatives working specifically on internal security. European Union Counter-Terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove has endeavoured to keep the focus on the importance of external democracy support, but has struggled to influence other departments to move policy in this direction. Experts

7. J. Kampfner, *Freedom for Sale* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), p. 200 and p. 209.

8. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Human Rights Report 2008', 7th Report of Session 2008–09 (London: House of Commons, July 2009).

9. HMG, 'Pursue, prevent, protect, prepare. Containing the terrorist threat: the UK Government's strategy' (London: Her Majesty's Government, 2009), p. 4.

agree that the external dimension of counter-terrorism strategy has remained hardly visible, that the Commission has stepped back from pushing a common strategy in this area, and that the focus is on the still-lagging technical implementation of internal CT agreements. This author is struck by the fact that when asked about the link between CT and human rights, European diplomats answer with reference to US abuses at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib far, far more than to repression in the Middle East.

A major security concern in recent years derives from a spate of kidnappings of European citizens by radical Islamist groups. On such occasions, several member states – in particular Spain, Italy and France - have had no qualms about cutting deals with radicals. Some basic principles have gone out the window when European governments have been faced with their citizens being taken hostage by Islamic groups. Several member states have increasingly resorted to paying ransom money as the frequency of kidnappings of European citizens has increased. On several occasions they have even pressed authoritarian regimes to release terror suspects as the price for the kidnappers to free their hostages. Such responses to the horrible moral dilemma of hostage-negotiations might be perfectly understandable; but these episodes have provoked complaints from Middle Eastern governments that European double-standards are giving further incentive to radicals on their soil.

The EU's downplaying of political structures contrasts with debates over trends in the Middle East. Analytically there is increasing breadth of agreement that it is political repression that lies at the heart of what appear to be religious tensions in this region. The notorious protests across the Muslim world against the Mohammed cartoons published in Denmark were orchestrated by regimes not Islamist parties. Arab regimes have done a much better job of wiping out secular opposition parties than the Islamists. Islamist parties have organised themselves a lot better to navigate the limited political space available; that is why they have attracted support, rather than due to a wave of pious purity. Middle Eastern regimes are still playing divide-and-rule over the Islamist and secularist constituencies, with the international community playing along. One of the main complaints of radicals in Saudi Arabia is the amount spent by the regime on foreign military equipment. All these features speak to profoundly political machinations. Many other trends portend the same: European security policy risks underplaying all such political considerations and overplaying religious tolerance as the supposed panacea in Western-Muslim world relations.

Conflict

»» A fourth and final strand of policy is the commitment to support democracy as part of peace-building strategies in conflict scenarios. Democracy-building funding initiatives are now undertaken in all situations where the EU jointly or member states individually intervene in peace support missions. Democracy is presented as requisite to installing and maintaining peaceable politics between warring factions. It is seen as the means of combating insurgencies, bringing fighters into mainstream political processes. Once again,

however, many aspects of EU policy belie such reasoning. Advancing democracy is rarely the motive per se of peace-support interventions, but has been described as more of a ‘retrofitted rationale’ introduced quite separately from the factors seen as causally related to conflict.¹⁰

Space precludes a detailed overview of European democracy-building programmes in situations of fragility. It suffices to register that such initiatives have grown in scale and comprehensiveness in recent years. Most member states now have dedicated stabilisation (or similar) units charged with engaging on the underlying politics of civil conflict. Growing shares of global democracy assistance are spent in conflict scenarios and invested with clear peace-building relevance. For several years now, exhaustive attention has been paid to ensuring that the large amounts of standard development assistance spent in fragile states incorporate elements designed to assuage grievances through increased political participation. The Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) is the best known of such efforts to link security, development and governance reform in a more seamless fashion.

However, several reports have charted the political dimensions of EU conflict interventions and all conclude similarly that support for democratic institution-building is of limited effect. In all cases where the EU has intervened in situations of fragility, the autocracy-derived drivers of conflict persist and have scarcely abated in their intensity. A long-awaited Action Plan ostensibly oriented to participative approaches to peace-building remains stalled.

A number of features prevail in EU interventions that often rub uneasily against the ostensible commitment to democracy.¹¹ The main priority of such engagements is crisis management. The EU has made most progress in improving its contribution to short-term crisis management, investing particular attention to civilian-military linkages. Democracy-building efforts have increasingly been left behind relative to this priority focus. Closely linked to this is the fact that in many conflicts counter-insurgency now represents the overwhelming bulk of policy effort. The objectives are phrased in terms of defeating insurgents far more than building democratic states.

Another feature is the focus on mediation aimed at peace deals rather than reform of political processes as such. The EU’s engagement follows a similar pattern across different conflicts, and tends to limit itself to mediating a ceasefire; sponsoring a reconciliation process; and then funding preparations for elections, but without following through to ensure that such polls are carried out in a free and fair manner. Each stage entails seeing the autocratic regime as part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.¹² The experience of Iraq, where the absence of a basic political accord has militated against institution-building and stability, has encouraged agencies such as the UK Department

10. L. Mitchell, ‘Beyond Bombs and Ballots: Dispelling Myths about Democracy Assistance’, *The National Interest*, March-April 2007, p. 36.

11. Key examples of such reports and assessments are: G. Grevi, D. Helley and D. Keohane (eds.), *European Security and Defence Policy: The First Ten Years (1999-2009)* (Paris: ISS, 2009); L. Anten, ‘Strengthening Governance in Post-conflict Fragile States’ (The Hague: The Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009); Commission of the European Communities and Soges S.p.A., ‘Support Study in View of the Follow-up to the 2007 Commission Communication, Council Conclusions and EP Resolution on Situations of Fragility – Mapping of Donors, Actors, Financial Instruments and Assessment Tools in Situations of Fragility’, 2008; F. Faria and P. M. Ferreira, *Situations of Fragility: Challenges for a European Response Strategy* (Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2007).

12. J.-Y. Haine, ‘The European crisis of liberal internationalism’, *International Journal*, Spring 2009, p. 467.

for International Development (DfID) to shift their focus to helping craft ‘political settlements’ – not an approach that is necessarily anti-democracy, but one which turns the primary policy attention away from competitive politics.

Under the Lisbon treaty attention has centred on the setting up of a mediation unit. In terms of local, third country political structures, this approach entails ‘working with what there is’. Donors now rely increasingly on ‘traditional’ structures, such as village councils. Talk abounds of increased support for and recognition of ‘indigenous concepts of reconciliation’ informed by anthropological accounts of difference. In conflict situations, donors like DfID talk of the need for ‘responsive government’ without stipulating whether they see democracy as most likely to provide such responsiveness.

And the main thrust of funding initiatives is towards building state capabilities. What the EU really judges to be most necessary to stabilising fragile polities is a strong, more than a democratically accountable, state. One lesson firmly learned is that elections should not be held before institutional structures are strengthened. The logic is to press political elites and/or insurgents to conclude a power-sharing peace deal and then broaden participation and accountability over the longer term. The reality is that this longer term aspiration is invariably and indefinitely deferred. Most funding in conflict states still goes on high-impact, state-focused development projects rather than on less noticeable, less tangible programmes aimed at long term efforts to modify the patterns of decision-making. It is recognised that many such state-enhancing programmes have shored up repressive leaders in the search for quick, quantitative measures of stabilisation.¹³

Conflict resolution and fragile state policy is an area of security strategy where the formal design of and thinking behind European policy has certainly evolved into impressively sophisticated approaches. Agencies such as DfID have elaborated a range of strategies that assess carefully the complex nature of political processes effecting conflict. But they equally acknowledge that implementing such holistic reform-oriented thinking remains difficult and that donors’ state-building efforts have ‘tended to strengthen or ignore predatory elites’, undermining long-term state capacity.¹⁴ The concern with ‘joining-up’ different departmental processes, within the bafflingly complex multi-actored bureaucratic processes that have now emerged in the field of conflict stabilisation, risks diverting attention from some of the straightforward political issues that emanate from the nature of unstable regimes.¹⁵

The risk is that the pre-eminence of these guiding principles means that reform-oriented initiatives can often contradict their own premises. Much formal state-building has ended up serving an intimate cabal of the international aid complex and local elites, to the

›››

13. ODI-Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Development, security and transitions in fragile states’, Meeting report, February 2010, p. vii.

14. DfID, ‘Building the State and Securing the Peace’, *Emerging Policy Paper* (London: Department for International Development, 2009), p. 9 and p. 15.

15. See the recent review of UK policy, R. Teuten and D. Korski, ‘Preparing for Peace: Britain’s Contribution and Capabilities’, RUSI Whitehall Paper 74, 2010.

detriment of democratic vibrancy at the community level.¹⁶ Support for power-sharing solutions invariably ends up being used ‘as an informal strategy to circumvent democratic obligations’.¹⁷ The security sector reform (SSR) brief has so far taken on little concrete form in trying to check militaries’ political power. Many initiatives carried out under the SSR banner look like fairly standard defence cooperation programmes, with little tangible reform aspects. Growing support for traditional forms of justice and local militias can sit uneasily with international human rights standards.¹⁸ One of the leading experts on state-building has recently gone as far as suggesting that the EU’s democracy discourse is entirely misleading: the fact that European policies support the strong state and rule of law rather than bottom-up liberal pluralism reveals that the concern is really with ‘managerial control’ and restricting conflict states’ de facto sovereignty.¹⁹

Conclusion

»» These four security logics overlap in practice. Separating them out here helps simply to demonstrate analytically the multi-faceted reasoning behind the democracy-security linkage. And it assists in identifying the limitations to democracy-enhancing policy efforts in different areas of security. These limitations remain significant. The senior kernel of hard security diplomats, defence specialists and armed forces personnel remains largely unconvinced by the democracy agenda. This agenda is promoted mainly by other centres of EU policy-making with a more indirect purchase on security policy. Democracy has found its place within conflict policies, at the levels of conflict prevention, peace support missions and post-conflict strategy; but it is not the all-encompassing, primary or guiding logic of CSDP missions and other interventions. In their counter-terrorist and soft-security thinking, European diplomats still need to give substance to the ostensible recognition that stability and the status quo are not synonymous.

There has been a move away from the most directly instrumental security thinking on democracy: regime change as a means of installing more pro-Western leaders. Today the focus is ostensibly more on the process of democracy. At the same time, much of diplomacy in practice still hinges around perceptions of the nature of particular leaders rather than the adequacy of underlying political process in dealing with social grievances. This leader-focus

16. A. Ghani and C. Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

17. M. Mezzera, M. Pavici and L. Specker, ‘Governance Components in Peace Agreements: Fundamental Elements of State and Peace Building?’ (The Hague: The Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009), p.36.

18. E. Scheye, ‘Pragmatic Realism in Justice and Security Development: Supporting Improvement in the Performance of Non-State/Local Justice and Security Networks’ (The Hague: The Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009), p. 36.

19. D.Chandler, *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 2010).

today generally militates against democracy support. Some experts fear that the fall-out from the Iraq debacle has undermined the whole general conviction that 'Western interests are served by strong commitment to helping spread democracy'.²⁰

None of this is to suggest that democracy is not at all supported. EU diplomats paint these trends in a positive light: we have, they insist, stepped back from our 1990s missionary zeal for democracy and now have a correct balance in understanding the advantages and problems of democracy. Democracy is supported through technocratic, functional cooperation because this is compatible with short-term, collective problem-solving on security issues.

The EU may have moved away from overly effusive interventionism towards an opposing extreme of classic nineteenth century 'masterly inactivity', content to let political pathologies weaken potential rivals – notwithstanding all its rhetoric about positive sum security enhancement.

And the logic is increasingly muddled: when the EU does give substance to its democracy commitments, it is often despite not because of security concerns. Encapsulating these overarching trends, David Cameron has made an early judgement in his government's incipient foreign policy: the UK is to preserve status through withdrawing from seeking to 'do good abroad', while striking new alliances with emerging powers and fighting to retain its formal top-seat representation in international bodies.²¹ Arguably, this turns the declared EU security logic on its very head. Support for democracy provides not the central driving force of the EU's security efforts, but fills the spaces left by other strategic policies. Most would say it is an extremely heroic assumption which holds that the combination of technical cooperation with collective problem-solving really constitutes tangible democracy promotion to the extent that diplomats claim. In explanatory terms, this ought to turn our attention to the role of varied rationalist calculations that persist alongside the constructivist-identity logic often said to form the heart of common European security approaches.

In short, democracy is not the alpha and omega of European security, but a secondary desideratum. European allegiances to democratic norms today exhibit more pusillanimous contrition than geopolitical conviction. The EU's commitment to supporting democracy as part of its overarching security policies can best be described as passively aspirational rather than operationally constitutive of those strategies. In this sense, EU security policy often resembles the traveller set on a Western destination who sets off to the east - but still convinced that eventually he will come round to his journey's end.

20. L. Whitehead, 'Losing 'the Force'? The 'Dark Side' of democratization after Iraq', *Democratization*, 16:2, 215-242.

21. P. Stephens, 'Capital E', *ESharp*, Sept-Oct 2010.

RECENT WORKING PAPERS

- 102** The end of democratic conditionality: good riddance?, **Richard Youngs**, September 2010
- 101** The Gulf in the new world order: a forgotten emerging power?, **FRIDE**, September 2010
- 100** How to Revitalise Democracy Assistance: Recipients' Views, **Richard Youngs**, June 2010
- 99** The EU's Eastern Partnership: One year backwards, **Jos Boonstra and Natalia Shapovalova**, May 2010
- 98** La UE y el círculo vicioso entre pobreza y seguridad en América Latina, **Susanne Gratius**, Mayo 2010
- 97** The Gulf takes charge in the MENA region, **Edward Burke and Sara Bazoobandi**, April 2010
- 96** Is there a new autocracy promotion?, **Peter Burnell**, March 2010
- 95** Change or continuity? US policy towards the Middle East and its implications for EU policy, **Ana Echagüe**, March 2010
- 94** European conflict resolution policies: truncated peace-building, **Fernanda Faria and Richard Youngs**, March 2010
- 93** Why the European Union needs a 'broader Middle East' policy, **Edward Burke, Ana Echagüe and Richard Youngs**, February 2010
- 92** A New Agenda for US-EU. Security Cooperation, **Daniel Korski, Daniel Serwer and Megan Chabalowski**, November 2009
- 91** The Kosovo statebuilding conundrum: Addressing fragility in a contested state, **Lucia Montanaro**, October 2009
- 90** Leaving the civilians behind: The 'soldier-diplomat' in Afghanistan and Iraq, **Edward Burke**, September 2009
- 89** La empresa como actor de la reconstrucción post bélica, **Carlos Fernández y Aitor Pérez**, Agosto de 2009
- 88** A criminal bargain: the state and security in Guatemala, **Ivan Briscoe**, September 2009
- 87** Case Study Report: Spanish Humanitarian Response to the 2008 Hurricane Season in Haiti, **Velina Stoianova and Soledad Posada**, July 2009
- 86** Governance Assessments and Domestic Accountability: Feeding Domestic Debate and Changing Aid Practices, **Stefan Meyer**, June 2009
- 85** Tunisia: The Life of Others. Freedom of Association and Civil Society in the Middle East and North Africa, **Kristina Kausch**, June 2009
- 84** 'Strong Foundations?': The Imperative for Reform in Saudi Arabia, **Ana Echagüe and Edward Burke**, June 2009
- 83** Women's political participation and influence in Sierra Leone, **Clare Castillejo**, June 2009
- 82** Defenders in Retreat. Freedom of Association and Civil Society in Egypt, **Kristina Kausch**, April 2009
- 81** Angola: 'Failed' yet 'Successful', **David Sogge**, April 2009
- 80** Impasse in Euro-Gulf Relations, **Richard Youngs**, April 2009
- 79** International division of labour: A test case for the partnership paradigm. Analytical framework and methodology for country studies, **Nils-Sjard Schulz**, February 2009
- 78** Violencia urbana: Un desafío al fortalecimiento institucional. El caso de América Latina, **Laura Tedesco**, Febrero 2009
- 77** Desafíos económicos y Fuerzas Armadas en América del Sur, **Augusto Varas**, Febrero 2009
- 76** Building Accountable Justice in Sierra Leone, **Clare Castillejo**, January 2009
- 75** Plus ça change: Europe's engagement with moderate Islamists, **Kristina Kausch**, January 2009
- 74** The Case for a New European Engagement in Iraq, **Edward Burke**, January 2009
- 73** Inclusive Citizenship Research Project: Methodology, **Clare Castillejo**, January 2009



Goya, 5-7 pasaje 2^a • 28001 Madrid (Spain) • Tel.: +34 91 244 47 40
Fax: +34 91 244 47 41 • fride@fride.org
www.fride.org