

ESDP Operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Realist Analysis

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Abstract: *Whereas most interpretations of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) operations are either normative or functionalist, this article argues that what motivated the European Union member-states to launch military operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is nothing less than a classic struggle for power in order to project power in Africa and counterbalance the United States. Therefore, realism and its theoretical offspring are relevant for analysing ESDP operations as they provide a convincing framework for understanding the motivations of the European Union to intervene in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

Keywords: International Security, International Relations theories, Realism, Neorealism, Balance of power, European Security and Defence Policy, ESDP, NATO, European Union, France, United States of America, Africa, Republic Democratic of the Congo (DRC), EUFOR RD Congo, Operation Artemis

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) experienced one of the most terrible conflicts of recent memory, with the First and Second Congo Wars (1996–1997, 1998–2003). The International Rescue Committee (IRC) estimated that around 3.9 million Congolese have died since 1998, making the Second Congo War the world’s deadliest conflict since the Second World War.¹ Such a dramatic situation in the DRC illustrates a Hobbesian world where, in the absence of a sovereign or central authority, the life of individual is ‘solitary,

¹ Simon Robinson, ‘The Deadliest War in the World’, *Time*, 28 May 2006, available at: <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1198921,00.html?iid=sphere-inline-sidebar>>

poor, nasty, brutish, and short² and ‘kings [...] because of their independence, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators,³ leading to ‘a war of all against all.’⁴

It is precisely into this Hobbesian world that the European Union (EU) launched two military operations, in 2003 and 2006 respectively. With regards to the first, *Operation Artemis*, the EU’s joint action plan⁵ stipulated the following aims:

1. to contribute to the stabilisation of the security conditions and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Bunia,
2. to ensure the protection of the airport, the internally displaced persons in the camps in Bunia and, if the situation requires it, to contribute to the safety of the civilian population, United Nations personnel and the humanitarian presence in the town.⁶

In the second operation, *EUFOR RD Congo*, its joint action ‘underlined the importance of elections as the foundation for the longer term restoration of peace and stability, national reconciliation and establishment of the rule of law in DRC.’⁷ More generally, the EU ‘supports the transition process in the DRC’⁸ through its *EUFOR RD Congo* operation in the country.

At first sight, and as the above noted goals clearly highlight, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) may be considered a ‘normative’ project; aiming to proliferate peaceful relations between political communities. Alternatively, the ESDP may be seen in a more functionalist light, symbolising one of the latest developments of European integration where states recognise common interests and call for collaboration in order to facilitate prosperity in regions where it is lacking. To some extent this is the common understanding

² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter XIII, <http://www.leopoldwilson.info/library/authors/thomas_hobbes/leviathan/first/chapter13.html> (Accessed 24 May 2009).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘Joint action, which is a legal instrument under Title V of the Treaty on European Union (common foreign and security policy, CFSP), means coordinated action by the Member States where an assortment of resources (human resources, know-how, financing, equipment, etc.) are mobilised in order to attain specific objectives set by the Council, on the basis of general guidelines from the European Council.’ European Glossary, Joint action (CFSP), see: <http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/joint_action_cfsp_en.htm>

⁶ Adopted by the Council of the Joint Action on the European Union military operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 9957/03 (Presse 156), 05 June 2003, see: <<http://ue.eu.int/>>.

⁷ Official Journal of the European Union, COUNCIL JOINT ACTION 2006/319/CFSP of 27 April 2006 on the European Union military operation in support of the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) during the election process, see: <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:116:0098:0101:EN:PDF>>.

⁸ Ibid.

of the ESDP operations in Africa. Being a relatively ‘soft power,’ the EU’s ESDP missions to Africa contributed to the ‘noble’ project of the EU: to ensure humanitarian standards in one of the poorest and most violent parts of the world. The historical relationships between European powers and many such African states throughout the 19th and 20th centuries – during colonisation – produces a moral imperative for the EU to assist reconciliation and development efforts.

This work argues that such an understanding is largely superficial. While normative goals might motivate such projects as the ESDP, the importance given to that self-constructed paradigm is disproportionate. Indeed, what motivates the EU member-states to launch military operations in Africa is nothing else than a classical struggle for power in order to counterbalance the US. Indeed, realism and its theoretical offspring are more relevant to analysing ESDP operations as they provide a more convincing framework to answer the following question: what are the real motivations, intentions of the EU to intervene in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

In order to answer this question, this work presents and assesses two case-studies: *Operation Artemis* (May–September 2003), the first European intervention outside its borders as well as the first mission independently conducted outside the NATO framework; and *EUFOR RD Congo* (July–November 2006). This work deploys realism as the theoretical tool most appropriate for understanding the EU’s role and intentions and assumes that 1) the ESDP is a tool for the projection of EU power in Africa and 2) the ESDP is a means of counterbalancing the US, and to an extent, NATO. Finally, this work draws some conclusions about developing a theory of the ESDP.

ESDP Operations in Africa: an EU Tool to Project its Power in Africa

Realism offers a convincing analytical framework to understand the ESDP operations in Africa. Realism, and more precisely structural realism, understands military power (and its acquisition) as a key to unlocking international political relations. From this perspective, *Operation Artemis* and *EUFOR RD Congo* were operations designed to project EU (and its members’) power in the DRC, through short-term cooperation, which was not, incidentally, as *deep* as it looked, and was rather based on the international relations objectives and national interests of the largest EU states, which also bore responsibility for operational management.

In a similar vein, for neorealism, states are primarily interested in their own security and should not be inclined to engage in interventions if such behaviour would not enhance their relative power and increase their relative security. But how can realism justify such an approach? Posen and Ross proposed an

interesting distinction between ‘minimal’ and ‘maximal’ realists⁹: whereas minimal realists such as Layne, Tucker, Ravenal, Buchanan, Bandow and Nordlinger argue that military intervention in any conflict in developing states should not occur at all, maximal realists Layne and Gilpin think that humanitarian military operations may offer an opportunity for the dominant state, such as the US, to demonstrate and assert its power.¹⁰ One can draw a parallel with the EU which, while not *the* dominant power in current international relations, attempted to demonstrate its capabilities by conducting military operations in the DRC. From this perspective, the stated humanitarian ambitions were secondary to the power aggrandisement of the EU.

Furthermore, while those interventions may be analysed as a result of *deep* cooperation, this work contends that they did not produce long-term collaboration between EU members; both missions were short-lived and in line with the particular strategic and economic interests of larger EU states. For instance, France was appointed as the ‘Framework Nation’ and the Operational Headquarters was located at the Centre de Planification et de Conduite des Opérations in Paris. Consequently, upon examination the scope, selected tools and strategic approaches to both Congo Wars were largely defined and executed by one dominant actor, France, which carved out a supervisory role for both missions with the aid of Germany and the UK. This leads one to question the particular strategic and economic interests of those EU states towards Africa in general and the DRC more specifically

Before embarking on a policy of military intervention, consensus between France and the UK towards Africa had already formed: at the St. Malo meeting between (then) French President Jacques Chirac, and (then) British Prime Minister Tony Blair, both of whom articulated the idea of promoting European values in Africa.¹¹ This sentiment was echoed in Cahors (France) when the UK and France agreed to cooperate to solve political crises in Africa, based on the ‘profound historic link with Africa’ (Chirac)¹² that France and the UK shared. At the Toucquet Summit (4 February 2003), both countries agreed on the necessity to carve out a leadership role for France and the UK in assisting the DRC develop a truly national army.¹³

Given the overwhelming French role in both operations, it is essential to explore French foreign policy and identify its strategic and economic interests so that a more in-depth understanding of the true intentions of those ‘EU’ missions may be seen.

⁹ Catherine Gegout, ‘Causes and Consequences of the EU’s military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Realist Explanation,’ *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 10, 2005. p. 428.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 428.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 432.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

It is commonly acknowledged that French foreign policy follows two main trends: on the one hand, a supranational, more normative approach to strengthen the EU; and, on the other hand, a more egoistic approach based on enhancing the role of France as a great international actor. Indeed, it seems that France used the EU as a means of pursue both European and its own national interests.

Before launching the European mission(s) to the DRC (2003), France was in the midst of preparing ‘Operation Mamba.’¹⁴ However, Chirac recognised the opportunity that a European mission may present for both France and the EU; that, following the transatlantic crisis which followed the military intervention in Iraq, *Operation Artemis* was an appropriate vehicle to show European unity (as opposed to transatlantic unity) and, in doing so, accumulate some international political gains. Thus, in a bid to reinforce a particularly ‘European’ approach to international crises, France was able to lead the EU to agreement over its first military intervention beyond its borders, enabling an enhanced self- and international perception. The second operation, *EUFOR RD Congo*, confirmed the EU gains achieved in *Artemis* and emerged as a new actor; moving beyond the role of fulfilling primarily economic or political functions, to accept military roles as well. As General Damay noted, that mission was a contribution to the concept of European army: ‘I am very satisfied because I believe that we have a very well-functioning unit’ [...] ‘Now we really have the beginning of a European army.’¹⁵

In addition to such wide EU interests, France has more specific self-interests. After the controversial French Operation Turquoise in Rwanda (1994), the country needed to restore its reputation in Africa through the implementation of a successful mission with official humanitarian goals. Furthermore, intervention under the European flag limited the risks of casualties to French troops, and reduced the possible negative repercussions in French public opinion polls. More generally, EU missions under French command is in line with France’s relationship with Africa and the so-called ‘Françafrique’ where French interests are always represented and France has gone to great lengths; signing a multitude of economic, political and military oriented treaties with its former colonies and has therefore been able to maintain a significant role in many African states, and the conflicts they engage in, in order to assure continued influence. For instance, France continues to maintain a military presence of a few thousand soldiers in the Ivory Coast within the framework of *Operation Licorne* under the UN umbrella. While the DRC is not a former French colony but rather a Belgian one, France managed to extend its influence there. To some extent

¹⁴ Kees Homan, ‘Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo,’ in *European Commission: Faster and more united? The debate about EU’s crisis response capacity*, Netherlands Institute for International Relations – Clingendael, May, 2007. p. 2. This document is available at: <http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2007/20070531_cscp_chapter_homan.pdf>

¹⁵ Honor Mahony, ‘General eyes ‘European army’ after Congo mission,’ *EU Observer*, 01 December 2006, at: <<http://euobserver.com/?aid=23005>>.

both military interventions were a means for France to rekindle its traditional strategic interests with Africa, this time however, under the European flag.

France is not the only EU state to have tied its self-interests to the interests of the Union more generally. Germany, for example, has constructed an interest of building transparent and peaceful relations to its former adversaries through a common European defence policy which was designed to eliminate the unilateral use of military force. From a more realist perspective, one could argue that Germany's ambition is to undergo 'normalisation' in its international relations and may be attempting to maximise its own interests through EU institutions and security-related programmes. Indeed, the German-French alliance-in-opposition to US-led, UK-followed *Operation Iraqi Freedom* (2003) gave Germany self-confidence in the foreign policy realm, confirming that it has the capacity to publically oppose its US ally which has produced a general strengthening of its symbolic clout as an alternative to US leadership in the international political environment.

Returning to the premise of this work, it is clear that in order to project power in Africa, the EU needed to efficiently manage its material capabilities, and *Artemis* was the first occasion to do so. However, its performance was disappointing and *Artemis* revealed a gap between the rhetoric of EU intentions and the reality of EU capabilities. The EU showed poor long-distance communication skills and there were considerable shortages of vital transportation and airlift facilities required to conduct distant missions. Furthermore, *Artemis* showed the undeniable need to improve the interoperability of the European Armed forces as well as the coordination and data-sharing between operations' headquarters on the ground and Brussels.¹⁶ The second attempt with *EUFOR RD Congo* was, by all accounts, more organised and effective. Even though the 'commanders of the mission were reluctant to give further details about the fighting, aircraft and intelligence capabilities at the disposal of EUFOR,'¹⁷ the EU military operation seemed to have 'all means at its disposal, including helicopters and drones' to oversee the mission and respond at MONUC's request, if needed.¹⁸ Therefore, in terms of material capabilities, an improvement characterises both missions which may be explained by the creation of the European Defence Agency (2004). Its ambition is to

support the Member States and the Council in their effort to improve European defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and to sustain the European Security and Defence Policy as it stands now and develops in the future.¹⁹

¹⁶ Homan, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸ 'After the polls of 29 October, EUFOR resumes its patrols in Kinshasa city,' *Congo Planet*, 03 November 2006, at: <<http://www.congoplanet.com/article.jsp?id=4526614>>.

¹⁹ The European Defence Agency, Background, <<http://www.eda.europa.eu/genericitem.aspx?area=Background&id=122>>.

While the missions to DRC allowed the EU, and some of its more egoistic members, to better gauge its material capabilities and recognise areas where improvements could be made, there was a gross exaggeration over the EU's intended goals and how its limited troop deployment could be used to achieve them. It should be remembered that the EU mission was only 3000 soldiers strong, and lasted for 4 months and may therefore been seen as negligible at best. Even though both cases are different and note that the EUFOR mission was a reinforcement of the existing MONUC (UN) mission, a quick comparison with Iraq, where over 142000 US troops were deployed is demonstrative of a more comprehensive intervention despite that, officially, both the Iraq and Congo mission focused on political stabilisation and democratisation.

Realism may again serve to explain the lack of material and military ambitions of the ESDP missions when compared to the US. Morgenthau once advised that one should '(n)ever bring yourself in a position from which cannot retreat without a loss of face and from which you cannot advance without undue risk.'²⁰ Both EU missions to the DRC were directed against a relatively weak (militarily) state where the chances of success were high. Indeed, in terms of its shortcomings and achievements, *EUFOR RD Congo* was relatively successful; the international community greeted the results of the first democratic elections in Congo, which elected Kabila as the new ruler of the country, with tremendous relief. The EU officially congratulated the (then) newly elected President Joseph Kabila;²¹ and participation was high – 80% of the DRC's registered 25.7 million voters went to the polls.²² To be certain, there were several violent incidents in the lead-up to, and actual election, though according to the Carter Centre delegation leader Joe Clark, 'Instances of disruption or attempted manipulation of the electoral process, while very serious in a few cases, appear at this point to be isolated and unlikely to affect the overall success of the vote ... Polling stations were very well organized and electoral workers carried out their responsibilities competently and professionally.'²³

With superficial, but satisfactory, collaboration to fulfil the self-interests of some of its members, the EU managed to project its power in the DRC. To fully comprehend why they did so entails a contextualisation of the EU, and

²⁰ 'Bernard Johnson's Interview with Hans J. Morgenthau,' in Kenneth Thompson and Robert J. Myers (eds.), *Truth and Tragedy: A Tribute to Hans J. Morgenthau*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984. p. 382.

²¹ Helena Spongenberg, 'Solana calls Congo leaders to urge 'solidarity'', *EU Observer*, 17 November 2006, at: <<http://euobserver.com/?aid=22896>>.

²² 'Landmark voter turnout in Congo elections,' *United Nations Development Programme*, (Newsroom Africa), 31 July 2006, available at: <<http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2006/july/congo-elections-20060731.en?categoryID=349431&lang=en>>.

²³ Nico Colombant, 'DRC Observers Seek Transparency in Vote Counting,' *VOA News*, 01 November 2006 available at: <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2006-11/2006-11-01-voa38.cfm?CFID=135914824&CFTOKEN=85545413&jsessionid=de305745b9237321e322296a4a27c3a4b104>.

its members,' behaviour in the post-cold war international system vis-à-vis a dominant US. Indeed, France, and to some extent Germany, had a broader vision of those missions in DRC. The following section argues that these states assessed the international system to be characteristically multipolar, where the ESDP was increasingly being utilised as a means to counterbalance the US and, in some ways, disrupt NATO.

A Means to Counterbalance the US and NATO

According to neorealism, the distribution of capabilities is fundamental to understanding the functioning of international politics. In an anarchic international system, states are units which 'are distinguished by a greater or lesser capability for performing similar tasks.'²⁴ Thus, the major feature of the distribution of capabilities throughout the Cold War was based on bipolarity: two blocs, one led by the US, the other led by the USSR, defined the international political system. The 1991 collapse of the USSR further empowered the US as the sole superpower, able to define the very contours of international relations. Given that balance-of-power theory argues that fundamental changes in international politics, notably the attempt by one state to dominate a region or the world, will lead to counter-balancing actions, this work claims that the ESDP operations in the DRC was a first-step for the EU, and notably France, to challenge and counterbalance US hegemony. Under French supervision, *Artemis* had been the first EU mission outside of NATO structures and EU intentions were based on demonstrating to the US its capacity of leading an independent mission of international significance.

Indeed, it is now abundantly clear that both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations perceived ESDP initiatives with suspicion, lending further support to the claim that the EU was attempting to balance, even if softly, the US. This argument may be taken a step further and, upon reflection, it is logical that the US expressed a willingness increase the overt relationship between itself, NATO and the ESDP to streamline EU security initiatives and ensure that it maintains a dominant international position without having to explicitly oppose the construction of an EU army within the ESDP framework. Indeed, the Pentagon notes that the purpose of NATO cooperation with the EU ('Berlin Plus') is 'to prevent the creation of an EU counterpart to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) and a separate 'EU' army ...'²⁵ A US Congress report concluded that 'French officials have long argued that the EU should seek to counterbalance the United States on the

²⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House, 1979. p. 97.

²⁵ Barry R. Posen, 'ESDP and the Structure of World Power,' *The International Spectator*, (1/2004). p. 11. This article is available at: <<http://www.iai.it/pdf/articles/posen.pdf>>.

international stage and view the ESDP as a vehicle for enhancing the EU's political credibility.²⁶

Former French Foreign Affairs Minister, Hubert Védrine (1997-2002), recognised the ambition of the EU to disentangle itself from US security structures and contends that 'Europe is the best answer to globalisation and the predominance of one single superpower – the United States.'²⁷ Under such conditions, both *Artemis* and *EUFOR RD Congo* were meant to challenge the US by creating a wide 'counter-coalition.' While France played a significant leadership role in both interventions it was not alone. On the contrary, many other European states, which often took their international relations preferences from long consultations with the US, contributed by sending their own soldiers. For instance, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia and the UK materially and politically supported *EUFOR RD Congo*. Even though those states belong to the EU, their integration into an independent EU operation is highly symbolic since all, except Ireland, also belong to NATO. As a consequence, their participation undermined their common position about the importance and the utility of the US as the major power in the international system. Basically, they recognise that NATO is not the only military means to resolve problems around the world: the EU can also ensure such a role.

Such a behavior where secondary states decide to join a coalition which is weaker in comparison with a bigger one is perfectly illustrated by Waltz's analysis: 'Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side; for it is the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side; they are both more appreciated and safer, provided, of course, that the coalition they joined achieves enough defensive or deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking.'²⁸ Applying this logic in its entirety to both ESDP operations in the DRC would be far-fetched. Indeed, the EU, the US, and their respective coalitions are not both involved in a direct or even latent conflict with each other. As mentioned previously, many European countries belong to both coalitions.

This behavior of some secondary states such as Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland or Slovakia which decided to militarily contribute to the EU mission, however, demonstrates the precision of Waltz's statement to the extent that they feel more appreciated and protected: being under the still small but growing European coalition might give them more visibility than they would have get under a US or NATO coalition. More visible, their contributions could only be more appreciated by the different members of the coalition and notably major states such as Germany and France. Thus, the fact that Central European countries like Hungary and the Czech Republic were enthusiastic for an EU

²⁶ Sally McNamara, 'Executive Summary: Shaping the NATO-EU Relationship: What the U.S. Must Do,' *The Heritage Foundation*, 08 October 2008, see: <<http://www.heritage.org/research/europe/bg2195es.cfm>>.

²⁷ McNamara.

²⁸ Waltz. p. 127.

mission such as *Artemis* was not a coincidence at all: those countries officially became members of the EU only one year later. Their participation was somehow a rite of passage for the upcoming new EU member states. As Waltz says, ‘the freedom of choice of any one state is limited by the actions of all the others’²⁹ and those Central European states could only join the coalition of their future regional association. Even more interesting is the case of Turkey, not a member of the EU, but one of the main contributors of *EUFOR RD CONGO*. One could easily argue that such a commitment to an intervention in the DRC illustrates Turkey’s plan to get closer to the EU for future possible admission. In that context, Turkey could only put forward its good will and was constrained by its political ambitions to join the EU.

Besides, to belong to the EU coalition for such secondary states was safer than being a full member of a stronger coalition such as the US-led one. Indeed, since a weaker coalition can only have more modest military ambitions than the hegemonic one, its chances of success are higher as the relative success of the ESDP missions in the DRC demonstrates. Drawing a parallel with the involvement of the NATO and American coalitions respectively in Afghanistan and Iraq, shows that those stronger coalitions, which have more ambitious goals, led to the current situation, which put their contributors and therefore, some secondary states, in a more vulnerable situation.

More generally, once all those states integrated the EU coalition, the latter adopted balance-of-power behaviour where it contested the hegemony of the dominant power, i.e. the US, without an open military conflict between them. This may be analysed through the concept of ‘soft balancing.’ Vis-à-vis the absence of traditional balance-of-power state behaviours in the post-cold war period, Walt,³⁰ Joffe,³¹ and Pape³² articulated this concept which is defined by the latter as being ‘actions that do not directly challenge preponderance but that use non-military tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral US military policies.’³³ Yet ESDP missions in general, and more particularly in the DRC, are nothing less than military missions. However, they are not openly targeted against the US. The consensus about the ESDP missions, from that perspective, is that ‘soft balancing’ is a consequence of structural conditions of

²⁹ Waltz, *Man, the State and War – A Theoretical Analysis*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1992. pp. 204, 209.

³⁰ Walt, ‘Keeping the World ‘Off Balance:’ Self-Restraint and US Foreign Policy,’ in Ikenberry (ed), *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY (2002). pp. 121–154.

³¹ Joffe, ‘Defying History and Theory: The United States and the ‘Last Remaining Superpower,’ in Ikenberry (ed), *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*. pp. 155–180.

³² Robert A. Pape, ‘Soft Balancing against the United States,’ *International Security* 30(1) (2005). p. 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-45.

the unipolar system in which we live.³⁴ In addition to represent a better camp for some secondary states like Hungary or Slovakia, both *Artemis* and *EUFOR RD CONGO* resulted from the major characteristic of the international system which is, according to more recent realist scholarship, based on US unipolarity.

However, as both coalitions seem to distinguish themselves from each other, an argument could be made that the ESDP project is not so much about differentiating itself from NATO and the US in terms of their ultimate goals; it rather resembles similar struggles for power in international politics. From a neorealist perspective, this struggle – security competition – leads powers to imitate the successful projects of their opponents. Therefore, the ESDP’s ambition may be nothing less than taking NATO responsibility in *its* management of international crises. NATO was a successful project which contributed, to a great extent, in preventing a direct confrontation between the USSR and US. Though it has been living an identity crisis since the end of the Cold War, it is still an efficient military tool that Europeans had to ask support from in order to effectively intervene in Operation Allied Force (Kosovo, 1999). The ESDP is still a political and military ‘midget’ beside NATO but the operations in Africa were a good opportunity to maximise or rather better oversee their material resources. One has to keep in mind that both France and the UK are the major military spenders in Europe, and fourth and fifth (respectively) in the world.

Thus, confident with their military victory, both missions allow the EU to adopt counterbalancing behaviour towards the US. This was made possible by the support of some secondary states, notably from Central Europe ones and Turkey, which had to demonstrate their commitment to the EU where they were obviously more appreciated and safer. Finally, the only real similarity between US and EU military operations is their common struggle for internationally recognised power.

Conclusion

Whereas realism, and its many theoretical off-spring have been frequently, and heavily criticised over the past decades – notably, for their lack of focus on state cooperation – this work examined a more nuanced understanding of realism, where the states of the EU cooperated as a single balancing entity, and sought to answer, with a degree of certainty, whether *EUFOR RD Congo* and *Artemis* were humanitarian/peace-keeping missions coordinated by a coalition of different states or if the nature of such military missions was, above all, realist in their focus and intent.

³⁴ This is the position shared by Art, Posen and Jones. See Robert J. Art, (2005/6) ‘Correspondence: Striking the Balance,’ *International Security* 30(3). pp. 177–185; Posen (2006), ‘European Union Security and Defence Policy: Response to Unipolarity?’ *Security Studies*, 15(2). pp. 149–186; Jones (2007), *The Rise of European Security Cooperation*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

This article demonstrated that such superficial collaboration allowed the most powerful states of the coalition to fulfil their national interests while improving the management of their material capabilities in order to project power in Africa. Furthermore, it was also a tool of integration for the incoming EU member states, which contributed to a projection of power, easily assimilated to typical counterbalancing behaviour vis-à-vis the US; a sort of ‘soft balancing’ which results from the unipolar structure of the post-Cold War international system.

At present, the EU is neither a state nor an international organisation, yet this ‘unidentified political object,’ as depicted by Delors, may assume more realist behaviour as ‘normal’ states around the world often do. Beyond the official humanitarian goals, both *Artemis* and *EUFOR RD Congo* highlights that the EU pursues its member-states’ interests with an open ambition to counterbalance the US. This behaviour, however, continues to be fairly infrequent as the EU does not have the military or political means to act aggressively and risk its real and functioning relationship with the US and therefore the EU tends to deploy ‘soft’ security tools as a rule. The danger is however, that the more politically aware the EU becomes in assuming international responsibilities the greater the chances of increasing tensions with the US and if the two operations in Congo are anything to go by, it seems that, as time goes on, the EU will emerge as a strategic rival to the US with all its consequences