

Realism and the Common Security and Defence Policy*

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Abstract

The European Union has ventured into the business of power politics with its common security and defence policy (CSDP). Realism can explain both why the EU is being pulled into this business and why it is failing to be powerful. Although realism has much to offer, it is not the dominant approach to the study of the EU and its foreign affairs because the EU is commonly perceived as capable of transcending power politics as we used to know it. The first purpose of this article is therefore to question the stereotyping of realism as a framework that only applies to great power confrontations. The second is to introduce the complexity of realist thought because realism is a house divided. The analysis first examines structural realism, then the classical realist tradition. The third and final purpose of the article is to evaluate the contributions these approaches can make to the study of the CSDP. The most powerful realist interpretation of the CSDP is found to be the classical one, according to which the CSDP is partly a response to international power trends but notably also the institutionalization of the weakness of European nation-states. The article defines this perspective in relation to contending realist and constructivist perspectives. It highlights classical realism as a dynamic framework of interpretation that does not provide an image of a CSDP end-state, but rather a framework for understanding an evolving reality and for speaking truth to power.

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It was supposed to be a celebratory moment in mid-November 2009 when EU heads of state and government appointed Herman Van Rompuy as the new President of the European Council and Catherine Ashton as the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. These individuals would head the effort to breathe life and coherence into the Union's leadership, as envisaged by the Lisbon Treaty that entered into force on 1 December 2009. Yet disappointment with these low profile or even anodyne personalities ran deep among observers who perceived a bludgeoning rather than a reinforcement of collective institutions.¹ Matters hardly improved when, in February 2010, President Obama cancelled a US–EU summit meeting scheduled for May of that year – allegedly because of institutional infighting within the EU.² A decade's worth of constitutional reform had apparently achieved little more than the creation of a new layer in the EU's already complex institutional system that pitches agents of Council, Commission and Member States against one another.

What does the theory of realism have to offer in this context of EU ambition and limited capacity? Very little, some might say, and they would draw inspiration from the trend in EU studies towards the study of policy formation and Europeanization processes. This special issue is a case in point: some see the EU's CSDP like any other policy domain that should be understood in terms of its institutional history and policy networks (see the articles by Stéphanie Hofmann; Frédéric Mérand, Bastien Irondele and Stéphanie Hofmann, and Anand Menon in this issue), some see the CSDP as an outgrowth of Europe's social power configurations (see the articles by Chris Bickerton and Michael Merlingen in this issue).

That realism has been marginalized in this field is partly its own doing. Structural realism, the dominant theory presented in this article's first section, has come to focus on poles of power and since the EU is no such pole, the theory has little to say about it. Structural realism therefore tends towards the conclusion that nothing much happens in Europe and that if something were to happen, it would turn the EU into a pole of power. This neglect of change within Europe opens the field to critics who have been too happy to stereotype

¹ 'How Europe Came to Choose a Pair of Troupers to Perform Its Starring Roles', *The Times*, 20 November 2009; 'Herman Who? The World Greets New EU President', *The Independent*, 21 November 2009; 'Couple discret', *Le Monde*, 21 November 2009; 'La nouvelle architecture du pouvoir européen: le président et la "minister" des affaires étrangères n'entament pas l'autorité des états membres', *Le Figaro*, 21 November 2009; 'EU Couldn't Make It Up', *Sunday Times*, 22 November 2009; 'President Who?: Finding a Head European', *Washington Post*, 22 November 2009; 'Behold, Two Mediocre Leaders; Europe's Motley Leaders' and 'We are All Belgians Now', *The Economist*, 28 November 2009; 'The Rise of the Invisible Woman', *The Irish Times*, 28 November 2009.

² 'Barack Obama Snubs EU Summit', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 February 2010; 'Europe Feels Snubbed by Obama', *New York Times*, 2 February 2010; 'Snub for EU as Barack Obama Ducks Out of Summit', *The Guardian*, 3 February 2010.

realism as genetically biased against an understanding of European politics. If realism enters the debate, it is a type of policy realism based on a reading of practical obstacles to the CSDP rather than on the International Relations theory of realism (see the introduction to this special issue).

There is a different and vibrant realist tradition that offers a sophisticated view of power's purpose in Europe and is grounded in the theoretical sub-field. This vibrant tradition is classical realism and will be presented in the article's second section. Classical realism sees the CSDP as a case of power politics, but one steeped in traditions of European diplomacy and statesmanship. Politics is about power, but power has meaning and cannot be appreciated outside of it.

The stage is then set for an evaluation of classical realism and the view it offers of the CSDP, which brings us to the third and final section of the article. The discussion will show that classical realism has something unique to offer the broader scholarly dialogue. It assesses the CSDP as a power project but a fragile one: the CSDP is about rescuing the waning power of the nation-state more than about projecting Europe into the world. Classical realism advocates prudence. European leaders must resist the liberal impulse inherent in the CSDP and do more to embed the CSDP in a larger transatlantic framework that can balance institutional pathologies and encourage the careful management of the world order.

I. Structural Realism

The structural realist endeavour to explain the ESDP/CSDP begins with the structure of the international system and the preponderance of American power. It is only if the United States disengages from Europe and the EU consequently experiences a kind of 'shock' that EU unity will occur, as Philip Gordon argued in the late 1990s (Gordon 1997/98). American preponderance is a complex phenomenon for structural realists, however, and it has engendered vigorous debate. Scholars generally distinguish between 'defensive' and 'offensive' realists, with reference to the kind of incentives the international system provides.³ This distinction is helpful insofar as it explains one dividing line in the structural realist account of the CSDP but there are in fact three positions in the structural realist family, and to understand this it is best to begin with the family feud of defensive realists.

³ Kenneth Waltz is regularly cited as a father of defensive realism, but the link is not unambiguous. Waltz developed structural realism (neo-realism) and did not make strong claims regarding the motives of states: states 'are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination' (Waltz, 1986, p. 117).

Defensive realists' claim that the world is not terribly dangerous is based on an 'offence–defence balance' understood in terms of military technology, geography and strategic beliefs, which is said to favour defensive strategies (Jervis, 1978; Van Evera, 2001). If there is no need to fear, it is unlikely that the CSDP is an outcome of fear and concomitant efforts to balance power. Instead, and given the current imbalance of power – unipolarity – the CSDP is more about drafting tools for a transatlantic and American-led division of labour (Wohlforth, 1999; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002, 2008).

Some structural realists beg to differ, though. Barry Posen argues that the scales are tipping and the world will not remain out of balance because the EU wants to balance American power (Posen, 2006, pp. 150–1; also Posen, 2004):

I argue that the EU is preparing itself to manage autonomously security problems on Europe's periphery and to have a voice in the settlement of more distant security issues, should they prove of interest. It is doing so because Europeans do not trust the United States to always be there to address these problems and because many Europeans do not like the way the United States addresses these problems. They want another option, and they realize that military power is necessary to have such an option.

He goes on to argue that balancing is happening 'quietly and cautiously' (Posen, 2006, p. 153; also Jones, 2006), which is a reasonable strategy given American power and leverage. Still, the bottom line is that distrust and distinct approaches to politics feed the balancing of power, and this is what the CSDP is about.

Posen's argument is a strong one. Other realists, however, prefer to soft pedal the balance of power argument because they do not see balancing taking place yet. Second-tier states such as France, Britain and Germany – and Russia and China as well – use institutional and diplomatic means to serve as a brake on American policy because they cannot outright balance American power. This is 'soft-balancing' (Paul, 2005; see also Art, 2004) and it may be particularly appropriate under conditions of economic interdependence (He and Feng, 2008). However, the concept of soft balancing is somewhat ambiguous in that it can be seen as either a precursor to real balancing, or as a means to redress grievances outside a power balancing framework and thus within the confines of American-led unipolarity.

It is in this context of ambiguity that advocates of durable unipolarity strike back in the defensive realism feud. They rely on the concept of balance-of-threat, according to which balancing happens not against 'power', but against 'threats' – which are a mix of power, military capabilities, political intentions and geographic proximity.⁴ On the two latter scores – intentions

⁴ For balance-of-threat theory, see Stephen Walt (1987); for an overview of this debate, see Wivel (2008).

and proximity – European allies have nothing to fear from the United States. The United States is far away compared to, say, Russia, and it is a benevolent country capable of reforming the international system to most nations' satisfaction (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2009; also Grieco, 1999; Taliaferro, 2000/01; Wivel, 2004). The EU is therefore not motivated by balancing, but rather regional security needs and the desire to influence American policy (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2005; Lieber and Alexander, 2005). The United States can resist this embrace because it need not worry about traditional issues of 'entrapment' and 'abandonment' – its allies are too weak to entrap it and the United States too big to worry about abandonment – and it has therefore turned to flexible coalition operations that maximize its autonomy (Press-Barnathan, 2006; Walt, 2009).

Offensive realists occupy the third position in this debate. They take a less sanguine view of American power and the prospects for global stability. The system is dangerous because, historically speaking, there is a 60 per cent success rate for offensive strategies (Mearsheimer, 2001a, p. 38). Defensive states are thus advised to prepare for war in order to avoid it: whence Mearsheimer's advice from 1990 that Europe should begin a 'well-managed' process of 'nuclear weapons proliferation' (Mearsheimer, 1990, p. 8). Yet some important geographical constraints operate. Because power (mostly) cannot be projected across water, regional hegemony is possible where global hegemony is not (Mearsheimer, 2001a, pp. 393–6). The United States is therefore pushed to detach itself from Europe – go offshore – and Europeans must face the underlying question of hegemony in Europe: German power. The CSDP is therefore not about balancing American power, but containing German power, and the United States, acting as an offshore balancer, can help (Mearsheimer, 2001b; Jones, 2003).

There are thus three arrows in the structural realist quiver: the CSDP as a balance of American power; the CSDP as a tool to engage the United States in Europe's regional security order; and the CSDP as a balance of German power in which the United States will play a limited role. The positions are clearly defined, eloquently argued, and policy prescriptions follow logically and persuasively. These narratives attract attention because they are insightful. However, they pretend to be more than narratives: they wish to reflect the world as it is. They are rationalist positions. On this account one may wonder why they do not settle their score: after all, if rationalist theory works, it should be possible to determine which of the three positions is more accurate. The careful delineation of concepts and subsequent empirical testing should do the trick.

The first of two problems with structural realism goes back to the founding text, Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (Waltz, 1979), and it

helps explain why realism has been so absent from EU studies. Waltz's systemic theory was a reaction to the behaviouralist ambition to move across levels of analysis – notably the international and the national – and have domestic sources account for systemic outcomes. It is true that Waltz's structural framework was portended by his *Man, the State and War* of the early 1950s, but his *Theory* of the 1970s brought about a new structural stringency. Waltz has subsequently, and to the frustration of some of his followers, refused to adapt structural realism for the purpose of (foreign) policy analysis (see Elman, 1996a, b; Waltz, 1996). His position has served to harden the debate and nourish the stereotype that non-realists appeal to in their effort to take EU/ESDP/CSDP studies in new, non-realist directions.

The structural heirs to Waltz have complicated matters for themselves and the realist cause. As mentioned, their contributions are insightful and eloquent. Still, there is a worrying degree of elasticity built into the key concepts they utilize. Military, geographic, social and diplomatic factors compete in all their historical richness to inform and define the key building blocks of structural realism: the balance of threat, the offence–defence balance and the balance of power. These are composite concepts whose many components defy easy operationalization and whose internal relationships are difficult to assess. Other concepts such as 'soft balancing' are if not elastic then vague, and can therefore support diametrically opposed arguments (in this case, balance of power and balance of threat accounts of the CSDP).

This is troubling for a theory whose key claim rests on 'objective' conditions that – if stringently laid out – enable us to understand the essence of all the messy details of 'subjective' conditions inherent in agency: people, ideas, policy processes and deliberations, bureaucracy, and so on. If the 'objective' conditions, the conceptual heart of the matter for structural realists, turn out to be as messy, then the house falls. Out goes the rational foundation for politics and out go rationalist theories such as structural realism. Cognizant of this danger, Waltz would have none of it. His followers have wanted to remain on the structural path he traced but have, for reasons of relevance and impact, pushed the path of inquiry into the territory of subjective factors.

II. Classical Realism

In 1966, Stanley Hoffmann's classical realist assessment of why the European political project was bound to be tied down by sovereign nations rather

than lifted up by federal and communitarian movements appeared. 'Domestic differences and diverging world-views' result in 'diverging foreign policies', and 'any international system based on fragmentation' tends to reproduce diversity (Hoffmann, 1966, p. 864). Critically, the system did not drive states to diverge; states diverge in the first place and the system allows for the diversity. What matters in history therefore is the 'substance' of units 'as much as their form' (Hoffmann, 1966, p. 862).

This is the hallmark of classical realist thinking. First, it does not believe scientific knowledge is possible (or therefore desirable). Raymond Aron found three distinct 'eternal goals' (survival, power and glory) but an infinite number of 'historical goals' and concluded that a general theory of foreign policy is not possible (Aron, 1984, p. 102). Second, the analyst must interpret the meaning embedded in goals and systems to understand power politics. Power has meaning in the international system, even across borders, and diplomatic systems can therefore be more or less stable (Carr, 1945; Morgenthau, 1993). Stanley Hoffmann's reply to Mearsheimer's bold advocacy was that Mearsheimer 'ought to learn more about the European Community' (Hoffmann in Hoffmann *et al.*, 1990, p. 192).

David P. Calleo looks at diverging national goals in Europe and Europe's diplomatic system (Calleo, 2001). There is a 'Europe of states' but it coexists with 'Atlantic Europe' and 'Federal Europe' – and Europe today is a 'hybrid confederacy' that builds on states but is not strictly speaking a confederation. Below this hybrid Europe we find an undercurrent of political thinking centred on political pluralism and ways to manage it within a set of political institutions (Calleo, 2009). There are several distinct ways to manage this pluralism – from Hobbes' centralization of authority over Rousseau's spiritualized contract to Montesquieu's intricate balance of power – but they all grow out of Europe's past and concern the management of pluralism, and they stand in contrast to the unipolar vision that has developed in the United States.

Calleo is focused on ideas but is a realist because he does not foresee the transcendence of power politics, merely its reconfiguration as European political co-operation evolves, and because he ties Europe's political fate closely to that of other major players in the system. Calleo warns current policy-makers that integration finds its anchor in western Europe; and worryingly, western Europe is adrift. There is critical advice to both sides of the Atlantic: to American policy-makers who have focused too narrowly on America's power and primacy and ignored conditions for stability and co-operation in Europe; and to European policy-makers who too easily use anti-Americanism as a platform for their individual projects: 'A Europe locked in opposition to America is unlikely to succeed in uniting itself'.

To Calleo, then, the EU's CSDP represents a compromise between political projects within Europe and across the Atlantic.⁵ Compromises require statesmanship, and statesmanship grows out of 'the study of history and philosophy', in Kissinger's words (Kissinger, 2001, p. 286). Statesmanship in the Atlantic arena is about managing the drifting apart of Europe and the United States. It is change wrought by history. The United States remains a nation-state with a vast range of interests that national leaders can invoke to ask for their people's sacrifice; Europe, in contrast, is moving beyond the nation-state but only partially so. Its common institutions are too weak for strategic policy and European nations 'have lost their historic convictions about a national foreign policy' (Kissinger, 2004).⁶ The nation-state is in fact thriving only in North America and Asia (Kissinger, 2007). The transatlantic alliance may not be doomed, Kissinger concludes, but the United States needs to think carefully about what it can and cannot ask of its European allies (Kissinger, 2009).⁷

The observations of Calleo and Kissinger should not be confused with the simpler point that EU institutions and policies such as the CSDP are sometimes taken hostage by national interests and that policy-making, given the requirement of unanimity, is reduced to the lowest common denominator. That the CSDP is structurally weakened by the nature of EU bargaining is an important point that balance of power theorists tend to forget (Howorth and Menon, 2009).⁸ Calleo and Kissinger, however, take us beyond 'positions' – be they internal to Europe or transatlantic – and focus on communities of meaning: power's purpose, in the realist vocabulary. Looking at the CSDP as a political community, both are downbeat. Calleo sees it as a work in the balance – a hybrid – for which he fears because it is being torn apart by the estrangement of Europe's communitarian and pluralist outlook and America's unipolar and Hobbesian outlook. Kissinger is equally fearful that

⁵ This opens a debate on 'pillars'. Russia has long pushed for just one security pillar from Vancouver to Vladivostok, which of course would put it at the main table next to the western powers. Atlanticists typically prefer a two-pillar scenario whereby Russia is outside and western Europe and the United States and Canada are united on the inside. Some Europeanists and, as we have seen, American 'offshore' proponents prefer a three-pillar structure with Russia, the EU and the United States.

⁶ Colin Gray (2006) has written that among his great geopolitical fears is an independent Europe (EU) because it will be weak and dependent on Russia for energy, and it will therefore align with a Sino-Russian alliance.

⁷ Julian Lindley-French (2009a, b) is less downbeat than Kissinger when it comes to the potential of the transatlantic alliance. Lindley-French perceives a European opportunity to shed its role as a 'junior partner' by taking on vital 'stability and reconstruction'. For him, Europe can choose to make itself strong; for Kissinger, this choice is less real because the limits of the CSDP are rooted in the dissolution of the nation-state.

⁸ The argument that the EU is structurally weakened is perfectly compatible with the unipolar argument that the CSDP is about regional security co-operation, for instance, but this is not where classical realism would take us.

the European political community will be shallow and weakened by its lack of strong and historical ties between its governing elites (the statesmen) and the governed.

There is a creative tension within the classical realist assessment of the EU and the CSDP. On the one hand, we see scholars such as Calleo emphasizing Europe's shared heritage – a commitment to 'a collaborative balance of power' (Calleo, 2009, p. 137). On the other, scholars such as Hoffmann emphasize the national legacy in terms of history, culture and outlook. If we follow Calleo, we see that Europe has much in common; if we follow Hoffmann, we see 'only a juxtaposition of national public spaces, capped by a jumble of intergovernmental and supranational bureaucracies' (Hoffmann, 2000, p. 198). It is possible to reconcile these positions. Both would agree that change 'happens' more than it is 'made' – that is, that policy-makers cannot design change.⁹ Both would also agree that a 'collaborative balance of power' could be an internal tool to manage the 'national public spaces' Hoffmann invokes. The CSDP is thus about 'domestic' European affairs.

However, the CSDP does have an external dimension. What should the EU do to handle real foreign affairs? Observers outside the classical realist tradition have ready answers: some, as we shall see later, advocate the build-up of a transnational outlook anchored in Brussels; others, the structural realists, push for EU reform in order to meet international demand (Hyde-Price, 2004). Answers are less obvious to classical realists. One option is to give weight and recognition to a European concert of great powers that can drive change within the EU system (Lindley-French, 2002). Others argue that this option is dangerous for a hybrid construction because it could split it, and they hence advocate instead the use of flexible coalitions to handle operations for which there is no CSDP agreement (Rynning, 2003, 2005).

What is clear is that classical realism foresees problems in bringing about external EU action and advocates prudence. Classical realism is inherently prudential because it was born as a 'school of thought' in opposition to modernity's blazing advocates of progress – a progressive effort that according to classical realist accounts culminated in the two world wars. Prudence in the EU case implies above all an obligation to be humble before the weight of history and the adverse affects that political decisions can create. Europe's past record of warfare stands in contrast to the hopes for a better future held out by the EU. The EU deliberately cultivates this contrast because it justifies the EU itself. Yet high hopes and an untested and fragile policy toolbox (the CSDP) are the ingredients of political tragedy, classical realists would

⁹ The transatlantic debate on missile defence is a case in point because it involves a policy design that runs up against 'attitudes shaped by history, culture and geopolitics' (Gray, 2003, p. 280; also Heurlin and Rynning, 2005).

caution. Statesmen could get carried away. Michael Loriaux instructively writes that: ‘The commitment to European Union is an affair of realist prudence born of scepticism’ (Loriaux, 1999, p. 378). French and German leaders, in particular, support the EU because they likely would be worse off without it. It is restrained behaviour on the part of important states that explains institutions rather than vice versa. Put differently, if the institutions – such as the CSDP – were to undermine the prudence that fathered them, tragedy could follow.

European statesmen should be cognizant of this danger and EU analysts and observers should remind them hereof, speaking ‘truth to power’. If analysts thus rein in statesmen and statesmen know history and their societies, then we may be able to ‘strike a precarious balance’ between tragedy and order. CSDP actors and observers may be frustrated by the limited ambition herein – after all, striking a balance is not a glorious endeavour – but greater ambition is the stuff of disorder that makes evil possible (Morgenthau, 1945, pp. 11–12).

This is about as far as classical realism will take us, which is to say in the abstract an understanding of power and its motivation and more concretely of the CSDP as a negotiated and unfolding community of power whose fate in the Euro-Atlantic arena is uncertain. Classical realism sees the CSDP as a result of the changes wrought on Europe’s nation-states by Europe’s history, political choices and global processes. The CSDP reflects the erosion of political power within Europe and is, as such, a measure created to cope with inner weakness, not external power. Classical realism cannot predict what will happen to the CSDP, nor does it make the attempt (structural realism tries, but comes up short). Instead, it offers insights and an understanding that statesmen, academics and others can rely on in their assessments of current realities.

III. Assessment and Perspectives

There are no fixed answers in classical realism. Insights are interpretive and historical and by definition contextual. The context is Europe’s complex communitarian and pluralist history and political reality, and if there is one lesson to derive from it, it is that efforts to augment the EU’s capacity for external action must be carefully crafted: efforts to push too hard – like enthusiastic federalists do inside Europe or American leaders sometimes do from the outside – will not advance policy but cause it to fail. In this section I will consider classical realism’s two flanks in the CSDP debate – neo-classical realism and constructivism – and the question of whether classical

realism should be drawn to one of them or whether it can stand independent as a distinct and strong contribution to the debate.

In respect to the first flank, a new position has emerged that seeks to combine structural realism's stringent account of structure and classical realism's broad understanding of agency, and this has become the neoclassical realist school of thought. It holds that power dynamics (the independent variable) drive policy but that people and institutions with long and complex histories (the intervening variables) actually make policy, which is classical.

In this lens the CSDP is driven by power – the rise of Europe and other non-American powers – but shaped and moulded by European people responding to their own desires and ambitions. Matching Fareed Zakaria's (1999) argument applied to the history of American foreign policy-making, Zachary Selden (2010) argues that the relative growth in EU power in time will produce a stronger and more assertive CSDP. If power is on the rise, the rest is a question of timing and policy flavour. This type of state-centric, neoclassical realism also explains why the United States may be an obstacle to a strong CSDP, certainly if we follow Christopher Layne's (2006a, b, 2007) criticism of the American East Coast establishment. An 'open door' elite has captured American foreign policy, Layne contends, and they make it the national (United States) interest to oppose policies such as the CSDP that may inhibit American business in Europe and elsewhere.

A slightly different neoclassical approach would use concepts such as 'status quo' and 'revisionism' to describe state motives (akin to what Aron and others did) and then match this distribution of motives with the underlying distribution of power. This is Randall Schweller's balance of interest theory where balances happen according to interests rather than power or threats (Schweller, 1994). Balance of interest theory has heuristic value. Its concept of 'jackal bandwagoning' suggests that the EU as a counter-project to the American international order may be able to attract the allegiance of smaller revisionists who hope to gain or profit from their support of the EU. The driver of this counter-project would typically be France. Schweller's 'wave-of-the-future bandwagoning' suggests that other states align with the EU simply because they believe the United States to be in decline and the EU on the rise.¹⁰

The problem with bringing together classical and structural realism, and the reason why classical realism should stand on its own two feet, is at heart theoretical. Neoclassical realists may provide heuristic insight and do in-depth case studies of great value, but they want more than this: they want

¹⁰ These concepts have heuristic value, which is not to say that their interpretation of real events is superior. It is not clear that France remains a leader of a counter-project or that the EU as a whole meaningfully can be labelled revisionist.

to derive theory and explain policy variation. This merely leads them into the classical conundrum of studying human motives in a social scientific fashion. The classical realists recognized the conundrum, gave up on grand theory, and set out to study people; neoclassical realists defy the conundrum. By making structural power the independent variable, one is not only bracketing all the stuff of classical thinking as ‘intervening’ but employing the language of causal theory that classical realists abhorred. Symptomatically, Schweller assigns motives but does not trace them over time and does not investigate their historical variation (Schweller, 1994). Recent stocktaking of neo-classical realism deliberately does not examine ‘variations in the interests of states’ because such variations inhibit theory building (Lobell *et al.*, 2009, pp. 31, 224; Rynning, 2009).

Neoclassical realism is in effect morphing into neo-structural realism, and we are better off detaching classical realism from this enterprise. Classical realism was always capable of providing heuristic insight and a framework for case studies. Moreover, classical realism will likely produce better case studies: unlike theoretically ambitious analysts, classical realists will not wrap case studies in arduous exercises of conceptual operationalization and the matching of empirical indicators, data set and variance according to the canons of scientific methodology.

This brings us to the relationship between classical realism and constructivism. Both are theories that emphasize the power of ideas and the inconceivability of statesmen acting outside cultural and historical frameworks of reference. Since constructivism is much in vogue, why not merely fold classical realism into constructivism or at least seek to create a marriage of convenience between the two (on the relationship between realism and constructivism, see also Meyer and Strickmann’s article in this issue)?

It is first of all instructive to maintain the distinction insofar as it nourishes contrasting interpretations of the CSDP. One such contrast concerns the CSDP’s transformative potential. Looking at the deep pillars of policy, Henry Kissinger wants us to understand the transatlantic relationship via the fate of the nation-state, and to Kissinger the CSDP has precious little power potential. Compare this to the constructivist argument that the CSDP does have potential because it builds on a process of ‘transgovernmentalism’ that takes place among political elites and causes the erosion of deep-rooted differences (see Mérand, Irondelle and Hofmann in this issue; also Howorth 2001, 2004, 2010; Howorth and Menon, 2009). In this view, the CSDP is what networks of policy-makers make of it. The argument is antithetical to Kissinger’s because he would abhor the suggestion that policy-makers are the engines of change. Policy-makers – ‘statesmen’, Kissinger would call

them – manage change and choose the lesser of two evils, but they are also fundamentally what their nations have made them into.

Classical realism and constructivism do sometimes share a fundamental understanding of politics as being rooted in strongly conservative cultures (or, identities). At this point the two schools of thought become more difficult to disentangle. There is a growing grey area between the two theories. Some argue that realism in fact is a proto-constructivist programme because realism's rationality is a construction in and of itself, an attempt to impose order on the modern world (Williams, 2005), or because of realists' inclination to harbour liberal hopes for a better future (Sylvest, 2008; Barkin, 2010).

My reading of this debate is akin to that of Jennifer Sterling-Folker (2002, 2009), who commends constructivism as a tool that can help realists think through their ideas on threats and threat formation.¹¹ It is important to recognize the creative contribution of constructivism but also to be cognizant of its status as an approach: it is not a theory; it does not tell us what to look for. Classical realism does, and constructivism can help classical realism do a better job. The enterprise remains, therefore, fundamentally classical realist.

The point of departure for this enterprise could well be classical realism's 2,500-year track record of pondering tragedy and criticizing modernity's blindness to its own capacity for destruction.¹² How should we in this context assess contemporary statesmanship and the current stewards of the CSDP, Herman van Rompuy and Catherine Ashton? The traditional classical realist position is first of all that we cannot judge statesmen according to the standard ethics of interpersonal relations: a special set of ethics applies to inter-group relations and therefore statesmanship. By this standard, EU and other leaders must free themselves of ethical foreign policy expectations back home and chart a prudent foreign policy course that minimizes evil more than it seeks the greatest good for the greatest number. It is far from clear that the current stewards are strong enough to do this. They instead appear to be captured by the liberal ideology of EU institutions according to which the EU is a different kind of normative power that can do good. Classical realists would worry that this cocktail of weak leaders and strong ideology may result in reckless policy.

The dialogue with constructivism could bring about a slightly different perspective. The constructivist emphasis on the role of transnational or supra-national ideas dovetails with a different type of prudence that continues to be focused on preventing adventurous statesmanship but which turns the classical realist view of ethics on its head. According to this, statesmen should

¹¹ Sterling-Folker is mostly known as a neoclassical realist, it should be noted, but she has a very broad understanding of neoclassical realism, it should be equally noted.

¹² For the pedigree of classical realism and also this view of modernity, see Richard Ned Lebow (2003, especially chapters 7 and 8).

indeed follow standard ethics in their conduct of foreign affairs, not because the purpose is noble (it is, but this would be idealism) but because it leads to proper prudence (Monoson and Loriaux, 1998). This combination of prudence (classical realism) and transnational ideas (constructivism) could yield the view that the EU institutions are critically important in anchoring European foreign policies – of nation-states as well as the EU itself – in a common set of ethics.

At this point, constructivism's implicit optimism might take over had classical realism not had a stark and distinct contribution. It is a pessimist tradition rooted in a tragic or cyclical view of history. Reinhold Niebuhr (1960, p. 234) told us that statesmen may be ethical in foreign affairs but only when they deal with like-minded nations. Niebuhr thus reminds us of dangers inherent in a pluralist world where powers rise and fall and each of them harbour distinct ideas and ambitions. A liberal – like the EU – would regard pluralism favourably but pluralism, the classical realist cautions, contains limits to co-operation. Classical realism would suggest that the EU's ethical bent grows out of and is enabled by the superior position that western powers have enjoyed, and it would worry that the EU does not adequately grasp the power politics that allows it to be ethical. It would worry that the EU grows obsessed with the promise of global governance while it *de facto* undermines itself by spending inordinate amounts of energy on intra-western criticism and rivalry.

Classical realism would applaud the choice of van Rompuy and Ashton because they appear as incarnations of Europe's complex and pluralist order but it would continue to worry that ideology and the need to justify EU institutions could push weak leaders into foreign policy adventures. More fundamentally, it would worry that globalization and power transition not only erode the EU's basic building blocks, the nation-states, but also pose a challenge of diversity that the EU is ill-disposed to recognize.

Conclusions

The realist family contains distinctive views of the CSDP. They share the view that the CSDP is an attempt to grapple with power and power dynamics and none of them see the CSDP as a definitive step in the making of a European security actor. The view that comes closest to seeing a security actor emerging is the state-centric, neoclassical interpretation of the CSDP as a political-institutional response to the EU's growing economic power.

As noted above, this type of neoclassical realism aligns so closely with the structural premises and theoretical ambitions of structural realism that

they become hard to distinguish. Structural realism argues that deep structural change, defined by the relative power of the great powers and sometimes also geography, is driving the CSDP. However, structural realists diverge and fall into three categories: some see the CSDP as a precursor to the real balancing of American power; others see the CSDP as a vehicle for keeping America engaged in the Euro-Atlantic region; yet others see it as a means to balance primarily German power.

Structural realists maintain a distinction between material conditions (power) and subjective factors (the motives behind the CSDP) that is in keeping with their ontological assumptions and theoretical ambitions but which sets up a fairly crude assessment of the CSDP: either it is a smart adaptation to power dynamics or it is a naïve effort to ignore or change dynamics that are beyond actors' control. Moreover, structural realism's composite and elastic concepts undermine its theoretical ambition and effectively push structural realists into difficult and complex assessments of what it is that the Europeans really want with the CSDP. This explains the absence of uncontested or firmly established theoretical explanations of the CSDP and thus the ongoing rivalry between the three structural interpretations.

Classical realism is ultimately a more persuasive framework for understanding. It integrates objective and subjective factors in its assessment, arguing that the distribution of power can only be understood with reference to power's purpose. Given its past, Europe cannot be like a nation whereby a people creates its state, nor can it be like a state whereby a political elite creates the people; Europe must build its political institutions, including the CSDP, on an evolving and in some ways threatened model of nation-states. It is the *de facto* capacities of Europe's nation-states, the implications of 'nation-statehood', as Stanley Hoffmann (1966, pp. 914–15) once noted, and the fate of Europe's nation-states in a changing world, one might add, that will tell us about the scope and purpose of the CSDP. This is also to say that classical realism finds no resting place. It sees the CSDP as an evolving institution and the theory itself contains no concept for an end-state – a pole, a power or an actor of some kind – that it expects to come about. It is an open and dynamic framework for understanding the intersection between power and purpose.

It might be appropriate to finish with the policy advice offered by classical realism. Because the CSDP is a weak external instrument, it should be used with caution and it would be self-defeating to attempt to garner European unity by criticizing the United States. The CSDP should at heart be about Europe's contribution to transatlantic dialogue and world order. When apart, Europe and the United States become 'dangerously provincial', writes Calleo (2009, pp. 165–6), but transatlantic unity in the sense of a balanced

partnership represents the hope that the west can accommodate the new Asia and meet growing challenges of global governance. 'The twenty-first century may then come to reflect Europe's new model for peace rather than its old model for war.'

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