Understanding Adaptation: UK Foreign Policy and the CFSP 1990-2001

Abstract

The emergence of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union (EU) has raised the prospect of first 12, then 15, 25 and now 27+ states sharing common positions on the world stage. In recent years, a number of analyses have appeared which explore the impact of the developing CFSP on the member states. Many of these analyses, have concluded that the process of adaptation is more substantial among the minor member states than the major ones (Tonra 2001; Larsen 2005). However, this conclusion has seldom been subjected to detailed empirical analysis. This paper undertakes an in-depth empirical examination of the United Kingdom (UK) to answer the central research question of ‘to what extent has the UK adapted to the CFSP of the EU?’ The paper therefore offers a comprehensive picture of adaptation in a member state which is not only major, but is also commonly perceived as an “awkward partner” (George, 1994), and which has a “special relationship” with the United States (US). It thereby bridges IR, EU and UK foreign policy literature, applying the theoretically-informed analytical framework to the examination of the developing relationship between EU and UK foreign policy.

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Introduction

A number of analyses have been carried out regarding the relationship between European foreign policy and the minor member states of the EU, which have arrived at varying conclusions. On the one hand, Tonra’s analysis of the Europeanisation of foreign policy in Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands finds that the ‘reflex condition’ has led to an apparent shift in identity and something more collective. He argues that the CFSP determines the foreign policy agenda for small member states. On the other hand, Larsen finds that while in some cases EU and national foreign policy are effectively part of one foreign policy system, in other cases the two are very much distinct from one another.

Although those studying the minor member states come to different conclusions, they are united on one point: that the process of adaptation to the CFSP will be less prominent in the major member states. Jørgensen argues that ‘[l]arger member states are likely to adapt less, simply because the “European” dimension is relatively smaller’. This assumption features frequently in the literature on the member states and the CFSP. It has not, however, been subjected to extensive empirical examination. Those who have attempted to analyse the relationship between European and national foreign policy in the major member states have tended to focus on the effects at the administrative level, or on attitudes to the development of capabilities at the EU-level, or on one individual policy area. In order to gain a clearer picture of the process of adaptation, however, a wider and deeper analysis is necessary. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of the institutional development and policies of the CFSP on the major member states through an analysis of UK foreign policy. The central research question is therefore: to what extent has the UK adapted to the CFSP of the EU?

1. The Theoretical Approach

The CFSP and its predecessor, European Political Cooperation (EPC) have attracted a great deal of attention from scholars. Although a wide variety of issues have been examined, the literature has been broadly concerned with two key questions: to what extent is the CFSP a success; and ‘of what is the CFSP an example?’

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In order to answer both, or either, of these questions, a number of authors have concerned themselves with the relationship between the member states and the CFSP. Their argument is that an analysis of this relationship and member state attitudes towards the CFSP may help to explain its effectiveness, or lack thereof.

These analyses have often drawn differing conclusions. For example, Hill and Wallace argue that ‘two decades of European Political Cooperation have transformed the working practices of West European foreign ministers and ministries’. Nuttall has labelled this process “socialisation”, and argued that it has led to a ‘reflex of consultation’. In contrast, authors such as Pinar Tank argue that ‘considerations of national interest have consistently undermined attempts at joint action’. The assumptions of the latter, and others, fit the rationalist schools of thought, whereby actors participate in the CFSP in order to maximise their own interests. For the former analysts, the process of socialisation they describe can best be captured through social constructivism, or sociological institutionalism. This holds that institutions – broadly defined as norms, values, rules of behaviour, and ways of doing things – have an effect on the actors involved in them.

Both rationalist and constructivist approaches are problematic, however, as rationalist explanations cannot account for the “coordination reflex” identified by a number of authors and CFSP practitioners, while constructivist approaches run into difficulty with the ongoing divisions amongst the member states. This paper instead takes an approach to the CFSP based at the rationalist end of the constructivist approach, labelled rational choice historical institutionalism. This approach assumes that member states form preferences both exogenously and endogenously. Foreign policy results from both rational calculations and the path dependent “logic of appropriateness” developed through social interaction. Although some would argue that combining various strands of the new institutionalism is problematic, the “founders” of the new institutionalism argue that '[p]olitical actors are constituted both by their interests… and by the rules embedded in their identities and political institutions… and the relation between the two is often subtle.'

2. The Analytical Framework

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17 The ontologies of rational choice, historical and sociological institutionalism are different from one another.

For the analysis of adaptation, an original analytical framework has been developed. For reasons of space, only three elements of the framework are outlined here. The first concerns the subject of study: the CFSP. There are two common understandings of what is meant by the CFSP. For some, it is a process of institutional development at the EU-level, while for others it is seen as a cluster of policies. In order to gain a detailed picture of adaptation, however, it is necessary to examine both these aspects of the CFSP. While the rhetoric surrounding institution-building may indicate negativity or resistance for reasons of national interest, there may well be more adaptation within individual policy areas, away from the media spotlight of Inter-Governmental Conferences and Councils.

The second aspect of the analytical framework concerns the concept of adaptation. Many analysts term this process Europeanisation, and indeed the terms Europeanisation and adaptation are often used interchangeably. It is also used as frequently to refer to a process of institutional development at the EU-level as it is to discuss the impact of those processes at the national level, sometimes even within the same volume. In addition, although many authors argue that Europeanisation does not necessarily lead to convergence, there is nevertheless an understanding that the process results in convergence around the EU norm or median. Expectations of convergence both bias and limit research on the relationship between EU and member state level developments and policies. The framework therefore employs the term adaptation which, although commonly associated with Europeanisation, highlights that the process under consideration is the impact of EU-level developments at the member state level. It also allows for a more nuanced understanding of the process occurring, as the concept of adaptation employed here argue that it can take one of the following three forms: convergence, diversion or leadership. A state adapts when it reacts to EU initiatives, in whichever form that response may be.

Thirdly, the framework offers a comparison of two different British Governments. The period of analysis – 1990-2001 – covers two distinct periods: John Major’s Conservative Government (1990-1997), and Tony Blair’s New Labour Government (1997-2001). The divisions over Europe and the strongly anti-European sentiments of several members of Major’s party helped bring about the Conservatives’ downfall. Blair’s Government, on the other hand, has been seen as significantly more pro-European than its predecessors. Examining adaptation across these two Governments therefore offers insights into both the validity of the Euro-sceptic and pro-European labels commonly applied to the two parties, and into the extent to which the attitude of a Government towards the EU influences the degree and nature of adaptation.

3. Adaptation in the UK

Adaptation to the CFSP and ESDP did not take place in a vacuum. UK adaptation to European integration more generally established certain preferences in the UK’s relationship with the EU, which influenced its adaptation to the CFSP. These focused on curbing increasing European integration, with both the Conservative and Labour Governments attached to subsidiarity, minimising the authority of the Community

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institutions, reversing the trend towards a federal Europe, and enlarging the EU, thereby favouring widening over deepening. At the same time, both Governments were strong supporters of increased integration where it was seen to be in the UK’s interests, and both expressed a desire to place the UK at the heart of Europe, leading European integration and ensuring its compatibility with British interests. These preferences featured consistently across both Governments, suggesting that Blair’s supposedly more pro-European stance did not impact the UK’s fundamental priorities.

3.1 UK Adaptation to the Institutional Development of the CFSP

As with European integration more generally, the UK’s preferences towards the CFSP related to maintaining the intergovernmental structure of the CFSP, and curbing the powers and role of the Community institutions. For Major, the ‘most significant’ decision taken at Maastricht was ‘the agreement to cooperate in a legally binding but intergovernmental framework in… foreign policy, and defence policy’. He also highlighted the need for the UK to check ‘the encroachment of the Community institutions’ within the CFSP. In November 1997, the Labour Government was also keen to emphasise that it had opposed measures which would ‘effectively undermine the whole pillar structure’, and stressed that control of the CFSP would remain ‘very much in the hands of the Presidency and the Council.

Consistent with these preferences, the UK adapted through leadership in this area. Leading up to Amsterdam, Major’s government put forward a number of proposals aimed at strengthening the CFSP institutions. They wished to reinforce the Presidency, and provide ‘better back-up for the Council’. They also proposed ‘upgrading’ the CFSP Unit of the Council Secretariat, and welcomed the expansion of the Council Secretariat’s role. The Labour Government also supported expansion of these intergovernmental institutions, supporting proposals to create the Political and Security Committee (PSC), made up of senior officials from the member states who would discuss foreign and security policy.

There was, however, convergence on the part of the UK around certain issues related to the institutional development of the CFSP. Within the limits defined by the UK’s preferences, there was convergence on issues of external representation, the expansion of the scope of the CFSP, and decision-making.

Henry Kissinger is often credited with raising the concern that there was no single phone number to call when one wished to speak to “Europe”. At Maastricht, the UK

23 Major, J. (18 December 1991) Commons Hansard. Column 277. It is possible to argue, however, that the agreement was given such prominence in order to divert attention from the lack of agreement on the issue of Economic and Monetary Union at Maastricht, which left the UK isolated, having decided to opt out of the single currency.
was clear that the EU should be represented by the rotating Presidency on the world stage. At Amsterdam, the suggestion was made that the EU should have a Mr/Ms CFSP, someone who would be the face of the Union’s external relations. In March 1996, Rifkind admitted that the UK was open to the idea of a figure to represent the CFSP externally. He contended, however, that that person should be ‘an official and not a politician’. With the change of Government, however, came a change of heart. Cook argued that Mr/Mrs CFSP would have the ‘authority and status’ and be able to act ‘in a more political role’. He also pointed out, however, that the Presidency would remain responsible for the management of the CFSP, and that the post of High Representative was there as an ‘extra resource’, accountable to the Council.

The scope of the issues covered by the CFSP was a further area where there was clear convergence on the part of the UK. At Maastricht, Hurd argued that the principle of the CFSP had to be ‘one of agreeing and acting together if we can’. At the time of Amsterdam, Rifkind argued that it was in the UK’s national interest that the European Union should speak and act together ‘where our objectives are the same’. Under Labour, however, the discourse on the subject changed substantially. Blair argued that it was necessary to ensure that the EU could speak on the ‘key international issues of the day’.

There was also some convergence on the issue of decision-making within the CFSP, although both Governments were determined to retain the veto. At Amsterdam, Rifkind argued that the debate was going ‘in a welcome direction’ as it recognised that ‘individual member states should retain the veto’. When Labour came to power, they were equally attached to the veto, with Cook arguing that part of the Government’s negotiating objectives was to make sure that the veto remained. He acknowledge, however, that the treaty had tried to ensure that the veto would not be used ‘lightly or frivolously’. The veto had clearly become the exception rather than the rule.

There was also convergence around the principle of Qualified Majority Voting (QMV). Initially, the Conservatives were opposed to the idea of QMV, even for the implementation of policies already agreed unanimously. The UK clearly converged on the issue, however, as Maastricht provided for the Council to decide unanimously the decisions that may be taken by QMV. Major admitted that he had told the Council that ‘we should consider the case for majority voting on its merits’. By the end of 1996, the Government had further shifted stance, and was ‘prepared to look at

34 Ibid. Robin Cook. Reply to Question 87.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
43 Treaty on European Union (The Maastricht Treaty).
ideas’ concerning QMV for policy implementation.\textsuperscript{45} This convergence continued under Labour, with Cook acknowledging that action under common strategies could be taken by constructive abstention.\textsuperscript{46}

The preferences of the UK’s relationship with European integration were evidently carried over into and dominated its relationship with the CFSP. The intergovernmental preferences of the UK influenced its willingness to converge, and resulted in leadership adaptation as well as convergence. These preferences resulted in numerous attempts to curb the competencies of the supranational institutions. There was convergence on expanding the scope of the CFSP, and on issues of external representation and decision-making, but again within the limits of intergovernmentalism. The UK therefore demonstrated a mixture of fixed preferences, leadership, and convergence, with limited differences between the Conservative and Labour Governments.

\textbf{3.2 UK Adaptation to the Institutional Development of the ESDP}

The development of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and UK adaptation within that is a particularly interesting area to examine, as the UK is one of the strongest supporters of NATO and a role for the US in European defence. However, the election of Blair’s Labour Government in 1997 and the St Malo agreement are often identified as bringing about a significant turnaround in European defence.\textsuperscript{47} There is little doubt that Blair’s Government was fundamental to the development of the ESDP. What is important to determine, however, is whether Blair’s efforts reflected adaptation on the part of the UK, and, if so, what kind.

As with adaptation to the CFSP, the UK retained clear preferences in the defence debate. Intergovernmentalism and unanimity in decision-making featured strongly, as did the idea of NATO primacy, and an aversion to the EU having defence (rather than security) capabilities.

In the early 1990s, despite the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet threat, the UK argued that collective defence through NATO was ‘essential for Britain.’\textsuperscript{48} With that in mind, Hurd contended that mutual defence and other significant military issues would never be ‘matters for the Twelve.’\textsuperscript{49} The UK agreed that Europe needed to take more responsibility for its security, but contended that it must do so in ways that would be consistent with NATO.\textsuperscript{50} The 1997 election which brought Blair’s Labour government to power did little to change the UK’s stance. Blair argued that ‘nothing must ever be done that would undermine that transatlantic alliance.’\textsuperscript{51} The Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, also contended that NATO was ‘the foundation of our and other allies’ common defence.’\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. Minutes of Evidence, Tuesday 4 November 1997. Robin Cook. Reply to Question 86.
\textsuperscript{50} Major, J. (20 November 1991) Commons Hansard. Column 276.
By the end of 1998, the UK had begun to change its position on European security, and Tony Blair took the lead in re-launching the European defence debate.\textsuperscript{53} In December 1998, the British and French Governments issued a Joint Declaration on European Illustrating British preferences, however, the declaration explicitly recognised that NATO was ‘the foundation of the collective defence of its members.’\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, the declaration argued that Europe would act only where NATO as a whole was not engaged.\textsuperscript{55}

In an echo of the debate over the CFSP, a further consistent preference for the UK was an aversion to Community involvement in European defence. Shortly after Maastricht, Major argued that the UK had succeeded in ensuring the issue of defence policy was ‘beyond the reach of the Commission and the European Court.’\textsuperscript{56} The Labour Government also objected to Commission involvement in the area of defence. Even after taking a leading role in the European defence debate, the Government argued that it would not be right ‘for the European Commission or European Parliament to have a direct role in defence matters.’\textsuperscript{57}

Linked to these issues was the UK’s preference for intergovernmentalism, unanimity and national sovereignty for decisions to implement operations in the area of security and defence. Prior to the Maastricht European Council, Major contended that decisions in the area of defence would be taken ‘by unanimity.’\textsuperscript{58} At the time of the Amsterdam IGC, Rifkind contended that the nation state remained ‘the fundamental entity for cooperation in the field of defence.’\textsuperscript{59}

Retaining national sovereignty in defence policy was obviously as important for Labour as it had been for the Conservatives. Prior to Amsterdam, Blair argued that the Government would aim to ensure an outcome which would retain ‘national control’ in defence.\textsuperscript{60} As the debate evolved, the Government consistently reinforced its position, reaffirming that they saw the European security initiative as ‘strictly an intergovernmental arrangement within the Union.’\textsuperscript{61}

On these three related issues of the primacy of NATO, Community involvement, and decision-making, the UK was therefore consistent in its preferences throughout the period of analysis. However, there was convergence on the part of the UK on certain issues relating to defence.

The first of these was the idea of a role for the EU in security. Returning from Maastricht, Major emphasised the British enthusiasm for strengthening European security co-operation, arguing that the UK’s proposals had been for ‘stronger European security and defence co-operation.’\textsuperscript{62} By early 1995, there were further subtle signs of convergence. Rifkind argued that the UK wished to work with its partners to develop ‘a European capacity to act together in peacekeeping and other crisis management tasks’,\textsuperscript{63} but within the WEU rather than the EU. Over time, however, Government attitudes began to shift further towards the EU. In 1996, the

\textsuperscript{53} This will be discussed in more detail below.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Major, J (11 December 1991) Commons Hansard, Column 861.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Major, J. (4 November 1992).
\textsuperscript{60} Blair, T. (14 May 1997) Commons Hansard, Column 68.
\textsuperscript{62} Major, J. (18 December 1991) Commons Hansard, Column 277.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 181.
Government argued that the WEU would need to develop its planning, command and control and other capacities for mounting ‘effective EU-led missions.’ In addition, they were concerned with promoting proposals for ‘closer co-operation between the WEU and the European Union on defence matters.’

The Labour Government initially carried on from where the Conservatives left off. Blair highlighted that the UK ‘perceived a common defence policy in relation to Europe’, but this was to be carried out through the WEU. Following the St Malo declaration, Government thinking shifted significantly. Blair argued that he had launched the initiative on European defence to enable the Europeans to take on security tasks through a ‘common European effort’. He further contended that it was his hope that the Cologne European Council would ‘give the European Union a direct role’ in security. There was, however, no question of the EU developing capabilities for the collective defence of Europe. The word defence was used only to ‘get across what we are talking about’, but for the UK, defence and security were distinct, and the EU was to be allowed a capacity only in security. The significant convergence demonstrated by Labour was therefore strictly qualified by the UK’s preferences.

The second area of convergence was the issue of the relationship between the WEU and the EU. At Maastricht, there were suggestions that the WEU should be merged into the EU as its defence arm. Initially, there was immense hostility to the idea. By early 1991, however, the Government acknowledged that strengthening the WEU was ‘linked to the process of political union’. However, the UK intended the WEU to act as a ‘bridge between the Twelve and NATO’, indicating again the Government’s loyalty to NATO, but nevertheless showing acceptance of the ‘developing links with the Twelve.’

At Amsterdam, the Conservative Government argued that the merger would occur ‘over our dead bodies.’ At the same time, however, they were keen to develop a ‘reinforced partnership’ between the two organisations. To that end, they proposed that WEU bodies would meet back-to-back with the Heads of State and Government of the EU and that the WEU Secretary-General be invited to attend European Council meetings, demonstrating some convergence. Labour’s stance initially echoed the resistance displayed by the Conservatives. Following the Amsterdam negotiations, Cook emphasised that the UK had kept the European Union and the WEU ‘quite distinct and separate organisations.’ However, Labour did allow for the WEU and

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Footnotes:
66 Blair, T (9 July 1997) Column 943.
69 Ibid. Emphasis added.
70 See Section 4.1.1.
72 Ibid. p. 98.
77 Ibid. Paragraph 28.
the EU to cooperate on the Petersberg tasks, indicating the beginnings of convergence on the part of the Labour Government.

By the time of St Malo, the UK had begun to converge even further on the merger of the WEU and the EU. In June 1999, Cook admitted that there was an ‘obvious question mark’ as to whether the WEU was still necessary, as there were things which could be ‘done better in the European Union’.79 By mid-2000, the UK position had changed even more substantially, with Hoon arguing that, as the WEU approached ‘the end of its sensible working life’, its committees and organisations, including the Satellite Centre and the Institute for Security Studies, would be ‘transferred into the European Union’.80 However, the UK was not willing to incorporate the collective defence clause contained in Article V into the EU, as this would undermine NATO.

A further related issue was that of developing a military capability for the EU. For the Conservative Government, any military capability was to be kept within the WEU. Hurd acknowledged that the UK was considering allowing the Europeans to develop the ability to provide a ‘European military response’, but argued that any issue on which the Europeans wished to do so would be referred ‘to the WEU’.81 Again, the election of the Labour Government brought little initial change. Cook argued that one of the reasons the Government had resisted the merger of the WEU into the EU was that it would transform the European Union into a ‘military and defence organisation’, which was not something the Government wished to do.82

With the St Malo declaration, it became clear that the Government had begun to change its stance. The declaration argued that the Union needed the capacity to take action ‘backed up by credible military forces’.83 There were, of course, qualifications as to what the UK was prepared to consider. They remained keen, however, to develop European capabilities within the limits of national sovereignty, strengthening the EU’s foreign policy ‘by backing it with a credible capability for military action’.84 To that end, the UK was instrumental in developing the permanent military committee and staff within the European Council.85

In addition to this convergent adaptation to the institutional development of the ESDP, the UK also adapted through diversion and leadership, with the Conservatives favouring the former, and Labour tending to employ the latter. One of the key diversionary responses of the Conservative Government to the suggestion of a security and defence capability for the EU was to put forward proposals to strengthen the WEU as an alternative. In the early 1990s, discussions were just beginning on the need to strengthen European capabilities and the appropriate structure to encourage that. Initially, the Government was clear that the answer would be found ‘within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance’.86 They suggested building up the WEU as the ‘European pillar within the alliance’, but made little mention of the EU within that context.87 Major admitted that the Government had put forward proposals with

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79Ibid.
83St Malo Declaration.
85Ibid.
the Italian Government to ‘build up the WEU’ in order to ensure that Europe’s
defence policy would develop in a way that was ‘consistent with our existing
obligations and arrangements through NATO.’

The Government also admitted to tactics of diversion prior to the Amsterdam IGC. In
March 1995, Major contended that there was ‘no question of the WEU being
integrated within Community competence.’ He added that it was ‘precisely to make
sure that that is the case’ that the UK had put forward proposals for stronger
European defence cooperation on an intergovernmental basis.

In addition, the Conservatives displayed diversionary adaptation by promoting the
ability of the WEU to utilise NATO assets to carry out European-led operations. In
May 1992 they began setting out proposals to that end. The WEU was to be able to
call upon ‘NATO-assigned forces’ or national forces, depending on its operational
needs, to carry out military operations. In putting forward these proposals, the UK
hoped to avoid the need for ‘elaborate separate structures’, and divert the focus
away from the EU.

By 1994, the Government had developed its proposals within NATO, with the
concept of the Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF). These were forces which would
be available ‘purely and predominantly for European operations.’ The Government
hoped that they would therefore ‘meet the requirements of the European security and
defence identity.’ They were particularly enthusiastic that the CJTF concept would
provide the WEU with a capacity for action which was ‘separable from NATO but,
crucially, not separate.’

The Government further welcomed measures taken within NATO in 1996 which
would allow for European-only operations using NATO assets, NATO headquarters,
and American members of NATO staff. However, Major’s second Defence
Secretary, Michael Portillo, argued that the new arrangements increased the
importance of ensuring that the WEU was ‘not subordinated to the European Union’
as it was ‘not a suitable body to oversee the WEU’s task.’

In contrast to the tactics employed by the Conservatives, Labour favoured leadership
adaptation, taking the lead in the European defence debate in order to shape it in
accordance with the UK’s preferences. Discussing Blair’s initiative at Pörtschach,
Cook emphasised that the Prime Minister had taken ‘the lead in Europe’, and argued
that the UK would take ‘a leading role in the defence debate that we have started.’
Blair acknowledged his motivation at the Cologne European Council, arguing that it
had always been intended that Europe would have a common defence policy. The
choices facing the UK were ‘engaging with that debate and shaping it in a way that
was fully consistent with NATO’ or ‘opting out once again.’

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
On issues of defence, the preferences of the UK centred around a consistent commitment to NATO, an aversion to EU institutions playing a role in security and defence, and a consistent preference for unanimity in decision-making. UK adaptation took the form of convergence on a role for the EU in security, the incorporation of the WEU into the EU, and the development of a military dimension to the EU. The diversionary form of adaptation was apparent in the Conservatives’ efforts to strengthen the WEU as the European pillar of NATO. Labour displayed leadership adaptation, taking the lead on the defence and security debate to ensure that it developed in accordance with UK preferences. UK adaptation to the institutional development of the ESDP therefore took all three forms of adaptation identified in the analytical framework. Having examined adaptation to the institutional development understanding of the CFSP, the following sections will examine two individual case studies to determine the extent of UK adaptation within policy areas, in line with the analytical framework.

3.3 UK Adaptation to EU Policy towards Cuba

Cuba is a small country, with a population of around 11 million. Nevertheless, its Communist leadership and proximity to the United States have led to a significant role in international relations. US relations with Cuba have been frozen since the 1959 revolution, and in 1995 the US attempted to widen its unilateral sanctions through the imposition of extra-territorial legislation on third parties. In contrast, the EU has pursued a process of critical engagement with Cuba, combining engagement and dialogue with criticism on issues such as human rights and political freedom as established with the Common Position in 1996.¹⁰¹

Britain has enjoyed full diplomatic relations with Cuba since 1902,¹⁰² and has normal trade relations with the island.¹⁰³ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening up of the Cuban economy, the UK decided to try to improve trade relations between the two countries.¹⁰⁴ To that end, the Caribbean Trade Advisory Group began leading business missions to Cuba.¹⁰⁵ Politically, the Government hoped to expand relations as Cuba made political and economic progress.¹⁰⁶ In the early 1990s, however, the UK’s focus was bilateral as the Government argued that improving bilateral trade between the UK and Cuba was “of more immediate importance than the longer-term structural relationship between the EU and Cuba.”¹⁰⁷

It was not until early 1996, shortly after the Spanish Presidency had pressed for an improvement in EU-Cuban relations, that the Government began demonstrating signs of convergence through the “reflex response”.¹⁰⁸ In response to a debate on UK relations with Cuba, the Minister of State at the FCO, David Davis, argued that the best way to encourage reform in Cuba was to maintain a constructive dialogue with the Cuban authorities in conjunction ‘with our EU partners’,¹⁰⁹ showing clear recognition of the role of the EU in this policy area.

¹⁰² The Website of the British Embassy in Havana The UK and Cuba: Bilateral Relations.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Columns 480-481.
¹⁰⁸ The “reflex response” refers to the habit of responding to questions on British relations or policy or representations with reference to the EU and indicates convergent adaptation.
The convergence begun under the Conservatives continued under Labour. In July 1997, the Government argued that the policy of the Government was to encourage a process of transition to a pluralist democracy and respect for human rights 'along with our EU partners.' Questioned on Britain’s relations with Cuba in November 1997, the Minister of State at the FCO, Tony Lloyd, argued that the EU had presented its Common Position to the Cuban authorities on 21 July 1997, and that the UK Government looked forward to furthering the dialogue discussed in the Common Position. Discussing the EU position was a clear sign of convergence, made all the more significant by the fact that the question concerned bilateral relations. That the Government was responding to questions on bilateral relations with reference to the EU indicated that EU policy had become part of UK policy.

With regard to the issues of concern to the EU, such as human rights and political freedoms, there was also significant convergence on the part of the UK. The day after the adoption of the Common Position, the Government Whip, Baroness Miller, argued that the UK ‘and Europe’ believed that engagement and trade with Cuba was ‘the best way to ensure that human rights eventually prevail in Cuba.’ Under the Labour Government, the reflex response in the area of human rights became more evident. Questioned on the UK’s response to an appeal by the Pope for an amnesty for political prisoners in Cuba in 1998, Baroness Symons replied that the UK supported the Pope’s appeal. She then added that the UK, holding the EU Presidency, had ‘coordinated an EU declaration’ calling for the release of the political prisoners, despite the question referring to the UK response, rather than that of the EU. The Government was also instrumental in the development of the EU Human Rights Working Group, which was created under the UK’s EU Presidency and brought together the Embassies of the Member States in Havana. The Government was keen to highlight this cooperation, arguing that EU missions in Havana had ‘broadened the areas in which they work closely together’ under the UK Presidency.

One further area of interest concerns US policy towards Cuba. During the 1990s, Cuba put forward a resolution at the UN General Assembly on an annual basis which condemned and called for an end to the US embargo. Initially, the UK abstained from voting on the resolution, arguing that it was a ‘bilateral matter between the Governments of Cuba and the United States.’ However, in 1996, following the Helms-Burton legislation, the UK voted ‘with European Union partners’ against the US embargo, with the aim of ‘condemning the US embargo against Cuba.’ While it is obvious that the Helms-Burton legislation was a key motivator for the UK in voting with the other EU member states, commentators argue that the development of the EU Common Position – which was then being drafted – also contributed to the UK’s change of stance.

Despite this significant convergence and the limited nature of UK interest in Cuba, there were nevertheless indications that EU policy towards Cuba had not completely...
submerged that of the UK. The UK retained bilateral relations with Cuba throughout
the period of analysis, with the Conservatives focused on trade, as already
discussed. Under Blair’s purportedly more pro-European Government, however,
bilateral political relations increased substantially. The Prime Minister met Fidel
Castro at an international summit in May 1998.\textsuperscript{122} In addition, the first FCO Ministerial
visit to Cuba since the 1959 Revolution took place in 1998, when Baroness Symons
held discussions with the Cuban Vice-President, amongst others.\textsuperscript{123} It is important to
note, however, that the UK was not alone in maintaining bilateral relations with Cuba.
Spain was particularly keen to retain its relationship with Cuba, and developed
bilateral Ibero-American summits without informing the other EU member states of
their intention.\textsuperscript{124}

In the area of policy towards Cuba, the UK therefore demonstrated both ongoing
bilateralism and convergence around the EU policy, and developed a 'reflex
response' to questions on Cuban issues. It also moved clearly from a neutral stance
to one critical of US policy, demonstrating that, on this issue, UK policy was aligned
more substantially with the EU than with the US.

3.4 UK Adaptation to EU Policy towards Iran

Policy towards Iran is a more complex area of policy to examine, given the long
relationship between Iran and the UK. However, this also makes it a particularly
illustrative means of uncovering the relationship of UK policy with that of the EU.

EU policy towards Iran was similar to that towards Cuba. It focused on critical
engagement, through the "critical dialogue", focused on engagement and criticism on
certain areas of concern, including human rights, the \textit{fatwa} against Rushdie, arms
procurement, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and Iran’s attitude towards
terrorism and the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). Relations between the two
parties were broken as a result of the Mykonos crisis in 1997, but were restored, and
expanded, with the election of President Khatami. The same issues of concern
remained at the centre of the now "comprehensive" dialogue, but cooperation
between the two parties was also increased to include working groups on
cooperation against drug trafficking, on energy and on trade and investment.
Relations since the period of analysis have been troubled by the issue of Iran’s
nuclear development programme, but the EU has maintained its preference for
constructive dialogue, arguing that it is the best way to bring about the reforms in Iran
which the international community wishes to see.

The UK’s relations with and involvement in Iran date back to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when
British and Russian ambitions in the Middle East were played out in Iran.\textsuperscript{125} In recent
times, relations were broken off between the two parties when the UK refused to
condemn the publication of Rushdie’s “Satanic Verses”, and Iran refused to withdraw
the \textit{Fatwa} issued against him. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait led to the decision to
restore relations in the interests of regional stability, but the situation remained
difficult, and relations distant. By the early 1990s, however, links between UK and EU
policy and relations were becoming apparent, with the first signs of a developing
"reflex response”. In March 1993, the Government argued that the conclusions
adopted at the Edinburgh European Council on the critical dialogue had made clear
the conditions necessary for an improvement in relations with Iran.\textsuperscript{126} This was all the

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item[124] Interview with Source XVI.
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more significant coming as it did in response to a question on relations between the UK and Iran, and not the EU and Iran.

The reflex response was also in evidence under the Labour Government. Questioned as to what action the UK had taken in response to the Mykonos verdict, the Government replied that the EU had ‘immediately issued a statement condemning the evidence of official Iranian involvement in these murders and withdrew its Heads of mission for consultation.’ Further convergence was also demonstrated through British Embassy cooperation with the Embassies of the other member states in Tehran. On average, these meetings took place once every three weeks, occurring only once a month in calm periods, but once or twice weekly during crises.

In addition to convergent adaptation, the UK also demonstrated the leadership form of adaptation. Both EU and UK sources confirm that the policy of the UK largely drove that of the EU during the 1990s, and suggest that it continues to do so now. They also argue that the UK spent a lot of time trying to form joint positions towards Iran, and tried consistently to influence EU policy towards Iran. Discussing the restoration of relations between the EU and Iran following the Mykonos crisis, the Government argued that it had taken the lead during its Presidency in early 1998 and that the UK’s preference for a change of perspective on Iran had been welcomed by the other member states. Sources at the EU-level concur that the EU dialogue with Iran was re-established very much under the UK Presidency.

There was also convergence apparent on the issues of concern outlined by the EU. In July 1993, the Government was asked what representations it had made regarding abuses of women’s human rights in Iran. Hogg replied that the Government regularly underlined its concerns to the Iranians ‘both bilaterally and with our EC partners.’ The reflex response continued under the Labour Government. In March 1999, the Minister of State at the FCO, Derek Fatchett, replied to questions on the UK’s action on human rights in Iran by arguing that the UK ‘and our EU partners’ frequently raised their concerns with the Iranian authorities.

More significantly, the UK was willing to allow the EU to act on its behalf on issues of human rights. In response to questions on UK action regarding the execution of a prominent member of the Bahá’í Community, Douglas Hogg argued that the UK was hoping that the Presidency would soon make a demarche ‘on behalf of the Twelve’ to the Iranian authorities. For the Labour Government, EU action was also considered synonymous with UK action. Following the arrests of members of the Iranian Jewish Community in 1999, the Government highlighted the German EU Presidency representation to the Iranian authorities and the EU demarche to the Iranian authorities on 7 and 16 June respectively. This was in reply to a question regarding the action that the UK intended to take, demonstrating the willingness of the UK to allow the EU to act on its behalf.

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128 Interview with Source VIII.
129 Interview with Source V.
130 Interviews with Source XXVIII and VIII.
131 Interviews with Sources VII and V.
133 Interview with Source XXI.
On the other issues of concern identified by the EU, UK policy showed both adaptation and continuing bilateralism. On terrorism, the Government displayed the reflex response, answering questions on efforts to combat terrorism emanating from Iran by pointing to the decision taken at the Edinburgh European Council to adopt the critical dialogue.\textsuperscript{138} The Government also argued that they maintained ‘regular contact with our European partners… on ways of combating terrorism.’\textsuperscript{139} Labour’s discourse on the issue of terrorism also showed convergence. In July 1998, the Government contended that it would raise its concerns about terrorism ‘through the new [comprehensive] EU/Iran dialogue.’\textsuperscript{140}

However, the UK also attempted to tackle the issues of terrorism and WMD bilaterally, arguing in October 1994 that it would maintain pressure on Iran ‘bilaterally’ as well as through the EU, and other multilateral organisations.\textsuperscript{141} The Labour Government not only continued to raise its concerns on the issue bilaterally, but actually increased its bilateral efforts on the issue of terrorism, arguing in July 2000 that it was developing its cooperation with Iran in this and other areas.\textsuperscript{142}

On the issue of arms procurement and WMD proliferation, the UK’s concerns were predominantly bilateral. In 1995, although the issue of WMD had been incorporated into EU policy towards Iran, the focus of the Government remained predominantly bilateral, remaining ‘deeply concerned at reports that Iran is interested in developing nuclear weapons and in acquiring ballistic missiles.’\textsuperscript{143} Under Labour, the bilateral focus of the UK continued, and by early 2000 the UK had begun to actually increase its bilateral action in the area of arms procurement and WMD proliferation. During the visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister to London in January 2000, he and the British Foreign Secretary issued a Joint Declaration agreeing to continue ‘mutual cooperation’ aimed at reinforcing international efforts to eliminate WMD.\textsuperscript{144}

The bilateral focus of the UK on the issue of WMD did not prevent some convergence towards EU cooperation on the issue. David Davis argued in May 1995 that the Government would continue to work closely ‘with our European partners to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.’\textsuperscript{145} Labour also argued that the UK had urged Iran to negotiate additional protocols with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ‘with our European partners.’\textsuperscript{146} The UK remained involved in bilateral discussions with Iran over their concerns, but they were evidently aware of and accepted a degree of EU cooperation on the issue.

Concerning Iran’s attitude towards the MEPP, the Government argued in March 1996 that it had made it clear to the Iranian Chargé when he visited the FCO that its policy was ‘unacceptable’.\textsuperscript{147} The Government then added, however, that it would continue to press home its opinion on Iran’s attitude ‘through the European Union’s critical dialogue’.\textsuperscript{148} Under Labour, the Government initially demonstrated the reflex response regarding Iran’s attitude towards the MEPP. In February 1999, Derek Fatchett responded to questions on British representations on the subject by highlighting the EU/Iran talks in Vienna in December 1998, where they had discussed

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  \item \textsuperscript{138} Hogg, D (2 May 1993) \textit{Commons Hansard}, Column 486.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Goodlad, A. (26 October 1994).
  \item \textsuperscript{142} Hain, P. (12 July 2000) \textit{Commons Hansard}, Column 291WH.
  \item \textsuperscript{143} Davis, D. (13 February 1995) \textit{Commons Hansard}, Column 519.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Hain, P. (17 January 2000).
  \item \textsuperscript{145} Davis, D. (22 May 1995) \textit{Commons Hansard}, Column 381.
  \item \textsuperscript{146} Fatchett, D. (3 February 1999) \textit{Commons Hansard}, Column 687.
  \item \textsuperscript{147} Hanley, J. (29 March 1996) \textit{Commons Hansard}, Column 1364.
  \item \textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
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the MEPP. By the end of 2000, however, there was little mention of the EU in the context of discussions on the MEPP. Discussing the UK’s concerns, Hain argued simply that the Government raised the MEPP with the Iranian Government regularly, and urged them to continue with the more moderate stance which they had recently adopted.

A further, extremely significant issue in relation to Iran was the *Fatwa* against Salman Rushdie. As the author was a British citizen, Iran’s refusal to revoke the *Fatwa* was a considerable obstacle to bilateral relations. The EU took a strong stance on the issue, including it in the issues to be resolved before further cooperation could take place under the critical dialogue. The UK’s reflex response was noticeably absent on this issue, however. Although the UK clearly did not prevent the EU from raising the issue, it made few comments on the role of the EU. There was no mention of the critical dialogue’s emphasis on resolving the *Fatwa* against Rushdie. Instead, in early 1993, the Government discussed only its own meetings with Rushdie, and the assurances that the UK had given that the failure of the Iranian authorities to repudiate the *Fatwa* and bounty prevented ‘the establishment of full and friendly relations with Iran.’

Under Labour, the Government began to acknowledge EU action on the Rushdie issue. In March 1998, Derek Fatchett argued that the *Fatwa* remained a significant impediment to ‘relations between Iran, the United Kingdom and the European Union.’ Nevertheless, despite acknowledging the role the EU had to play, the Labour Government resolved the *Fatwa* bilaterally. Discussing the issue in the Commons, Derek Fatchett argued that the agreement had allowed ‘a welcome improvement in relations between the United Kingdom and Iran.’ Furthermore, following resolution of the Rushdie issue, the UK began extensive efforts to improve bilateral relations and also increased its representations on a number of issues of concern. Thus despite the significant convergence displayed within the UK’s diplomatic relations and human rights policy, the Rushdie issue illustrated starkly the limits of British adaptation.

Nevertheless, the UK was prepared to stand alongside its European partners in opposition to the US approach. Robin Cook argued in 1998 that ‘isolating Iran economically will not hit the target that we want’, signalling UK affinity for the EU rather than the US approach of sanctions and attempted extra-territorial legislation.

UK adaptation to EU policy towards Iran was therefore mixed. There was convergence, evidenced by the ‘reflex response’, but also leadership and ongoing bilateralism, particularly in areas of most interest to the UK, such as the *Fatwa* against Rushdie.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to question, through a detailed empirical examination of the UK, the common assumption that adaptation to the CFSP of the EU will be less significant amongst the major minor states than amongst the minor ones.

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150 Hain, P. (30 November 2000). Columns 834W-835W.
In moving away from both the term Europeanisation and the association expectation of convergence, the understanding of adaptation adopted here allows for a fuller exploration of that process amongst the member states. Applied to the UK, it is apparent that adaptation amongst the major member states is more complex and nuanced than commonly understood. Examining two individual policy areas, as well as UK adaptation to the institutional development of the CFSP and ESDP has also helped to clarify the full extent of UK adaptation.

UK adaptation to the institutional development of both the CFSP and ESDP took place around certain consistent preferences. The UK remained committed to intergovernmentalism, with limited Community involvement. Defence was a matter for NATO, and the Commission and Parliament were excluded from this policy area. Nevertheless, convergence was apparent on a number of issues, including external representation, the expansion of the scope of the CFSP, and decision-making. In defence, there was also convergence around the idea of a security and military capability within the EU, and the relationship between the WEU and the EU. Perhaps most significantly in terms of adaptation to institutional development, however, were the diversion and leadership forms of adaptation. Both the Conservative and Labour Governments shared the same strategic goal of maintaining the place of NATO in European defence, and preventing security from becoming an area of Community involvement. They employed different tactics, however, with the Conservatives attempting to divert attention towards the WEU as the European security organisation, while Labour took the lead in shaping the European security and defence debate in order to ensure that it complied with UK preferences.

Within individual policy areas, adaptation was also mixed and complex. Both Governments developed a “reflex response” to questions relating to policy towards Iran and towards Cuba, responding to questions on UK policy and relations towards the two countries by pointing to those of the EU. However, this convergence was limited to specific issues in which it had been agreed that the EU had competence, and did not preclude other forms of adaptation, or ongoing bilateralism. Interestingly, despite the supposedly more “pro-European” outlook of Blair’s government, bilateral activities with both countries increased after 1997, rather than decreasing in line with expectations. In both cases, however, the position of the UK was clearly aligned with the EU, rather than the US, and indeed the UK became vocal in its criticism of US policy towards both countries following both Helms-Burton and ILSA.

UK adaptation therefore took all three forms: convergence, diversion and leadership. Ongoing bilateralism was apparent, and certain key preferences remained consistent throughout. Nevertheless, it is apparent that adaptation amongst the major member states is more complex than frequently assumed, and that the “special relationship” had less of an impact on the nature and extent of UK adaptation than commonly perceived.