

Old Myths to New Missions

European civilian crisis management in the 21st century

Richard Gowan and Daniel Korski | **The European Union is said to specialize in civilian crisis management. It has sent missions of police, judges, and governance experts to trouble spots around the world. But, upon closer inspection, its record is mixed. Brussels' new foreign policy team would be well advised to initiate sweeping changes in Europe's civilian capabilities.**

As Lady Ashton must be aware, the European Union does not have time to postpone a serious debate about its strategic position. The risk of failure in Afghanistan threatens to leave NATO crippled and Europe's reputation as a serious strategic player in tatters. The European Union's members are split over how to respond to Russia's growing assertiveness. And all along Europe's southern flank, from Mauritania to Yemen, there is evidence of Al Qaeda and its allies setting up new cells—developing a frightening potential to exploit the instability that exists across the region.

The European Union is in the unenviable position of having to devise strategies to meet these new challenges simultaneously. This is not only a political problem (not unreasonably, as Finns are less worried about Mauritania than Moscow, but Spaniards may feel the opposite); it is also an economic challenge. The financial crisis laid bare the fact that even major European military players, like Britain and France, are struggling to fund their operations and military procurement programs. In the years ahead, we will hear a lot of talk of “doing more with less”: using Europe's strategic assets as efficiently and cheaply as possible.

In this context, there will be a renewed focus on Europe's “civilian capacities,” its ability to deploy civilian security specialists, police officers, and justice experts to help stabilize fragile states like Yemen. Sending civilians to trouble-spots is naturally cheaper than deploying large numbers of troops—and in operations from Kosovo to Afghanistan, NATO and the European Union have found that a civilian component is essential to creating stability.

Devising and deploying these civilian missions is supposed to be one of the European Union's specialties. Since the European Council sent a police mission to Bosnia in 2003, the European Union has deployed fifteen civilian operations

worldwide—compared to just six military operations. These have ranged from small police reform missions in Congo to a 3,000-strong mission in Kosovo, launched in 2008, that handles not only policing issues but judicial reform, war crimes investigations, and customs.

The Union's ability to deploy so many missions—even sending personnel as far away as Aceh, Indonesia—was one of the great successes of Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief from 1999 to 2009. Working with a relatively small group of officials, Solana used personal diplomacy and sheer persistence to get each mission on the ground.

The European Union's bureaucratic systems have often struggled to keep up. Financing has been a particular headache: when the first personnel arrived in Aceh, they had to use their personal credit cards to fund the mission start-up.¹ European officials also admit that they have been lucky. Although EU civilian personnel have come under attack in the Balkans and Afghanistan, they have yet to suffer any fatalities. Had a European mission suffered significant casualties—as the United Nations suffered in Iraq in 2003 and in Haiti this year—EU governments might have recoiled from approving missions at such a high rate.

The EU's civilian missions were one of Javier Solana's great successes.

If only because Solana's reputation was closely associated with civilian operations, there is an expectation that Catherine Ashton will build on his legacy. She is ostensibly in a strong position to do so. Whereas Solana's team had to make up the European Union's operations as they went along, adapting available mechanisms to new challenges, the Lisbon Treaty gives Ashton a basis to overhaul the European Union's civilian capacities much more thoroughly.

How much she can achieve depends on how the Lisbon Treaty's provisions for a European External Action Service (EEAS) are implemented. It is unclear exactly how the European Union's diplomatic corps will be shaped. But member states have agreed on a rough outline and—after much back and forth, particularly between Britain and France—have agreed that responsibility for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), including civilian missions, will be part of its remit.

Further details remain undecided. How, to take a particularly sensitive example, will EU civilian missions be directed in the future? In the past, EU special representatives (EUSRs) have sat atop the civilian mission tree: all the civilian missions the European Union has deployed have taken guidance from EUSRs. But the Lisbon Treaty envisages a new generation of EU ambassadors: will these ambassadors now replace the EUSRs? Lady Ashton has decided to extend all serving EUSRs, giving herself time to consider the issue, but has yet to come to a final decision on how the European Union's new bureaucracy will handle civilian missions in the longer term.

Yet if Ashton wants to make real improvements to the European Union's

¹ Nick Witney, *Re-energising Europe's Security and Defence Policy* (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2008) p. 8.

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President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, High Representative Catherine Ashton, and European Commission President Jose-Manuel Barroso (l-r) at a press conference following the European special summit election of Van Rompuy as first EU president

civilian capacities, she will need to look beyond institutional reforms in Brussels, and focus on wider strategic factors. This means taking a fresh look at what types of civilian mission are needed in the shifting security environment, and how effectively member states contribute. Having conducted an in-depth review of Europe's civilian capacities, we believe that Ashton should address three myths about the European Union's performance in this area.²

Myth 1: The European Union knows how to make civilian missions work.

EU officials publicly point to their experience obtained since 2003 as proof that they have special expertise in civilian operations. This is comforting but misleading. The European Union knows how to do one particular type of mission fairly well, based on its experience in the Balkans. In Bosnia, then in Macedonia, and now in Kosovo, the European Union has concentrated on a relatively narrow range of priorities associated with embedding "European-style" values in each: strengthening the rule of law, and developing impartial and accountable police forces.

This was the right formula in the former Yugoslavia where police forces acted as paramilitaries during the wars of the 1990s and typically were split along ethnic lines. It was also seen as one step toward readying these countries for EU accession. Nonetheless, the European Union has a mixed record in the Balkans. Organized crime, for example, is still rampant in the region.

Deserving greater concern, the European Union has tried to apply the "Bosnia template" in places where it is unlikely to have much impact. In Congo, the European Union has trained police officers in the capital Kinshasa. But the

² Daniel Korski and Richard Gowan, *Can the EU Rebuild Failed States? A Review of Europe's Civilian Capacities* (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2009).

main threat to stability has been the fighting in the east of the country—1,000 miles away—and the European Union has largely left this situation to the UN to resolve.

The European Union also attempted to apply the Bosnia template to Afghanistan, setting up a police mission in Kabul in 2007, in part to counter American complaints that European NATO members were not sending enough troops. But member states were painfully slow to send personnel, and most police training is still carried out by U.S.-funded contractors. A European police mission in the Palestinian Territories has been undermined by fighting between Hamas and Fatah—at present, its personnel are barred from operating in Gaza.

The European Union has yet to take on the toughest form of civilian mission: a full-scale state-building mission with executive powers, such as those the United Nations ran in Kosovo and East Timor in 1999 (although the current European mission in Kosovo partially resembles such a mission). And the European Union has yet to work out a formula for operating in places like Somalia or Yemen, where its personnel would operate under constant threat of terrorist attack. Unless all future European operations are going to take place in the Balkans, the European Union needs new operational ideas.

There are significant disparities between EU countries' commitment to civilian operations.

Myth 2: European governments share a common faith in civilian missions.

A cursory reading of EU documents suggests that all the Union's members are equally committed to civilian operations. This is not the case. There are significant disparities between those countries (such as Sweden, Finland, and Germany) that take their responsibilities in this area seriously and others who only pay lip-service to the concept.

During its presidency of the European Union in the second half of last year, Sweden attempted to highlight these discrepancies by asking all member states to report on their civilian capacities. The resulting reports are now emerging, and will help Ashton put pressure on underperformers. Having conducted an audit of the members' efforts to improve their civilian capacities over the last year, we have already divided them into four groups:

The Professionals: Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. These countries deploy significant numbers of civilians in EU missions (relative to their populations) and have set up robust mechanisms for selecting personnel, training them and learning lessons from their experiences.

The Strivers: Austria, France, Ireland, Italy, and Romania. These countries want to make a significant contribution to the European Union's civilian operations—France, Italy, and Romania are among the biggest deployers of civilian personnel. Yet their training mechanisms are limited, and their system for choosing personnel is ad hoc or decentralized. They are trying to resolve these problems. France in particular has made progress in rationalizing its systems,

and may soon join “the professionals.”

The Agnostics: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. Members of this group supply relatively few civilian personnel to the European Union, and their selection/training mechanisms are weak. This is striking in that two—Poland and Spain—are significant military contributors to EU missions.

The Indifferents: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Malta. Most of these countries are too small to make a significant contribution to the European Union’s civilian capacities (although the Bulgarian government recently declared its desire to do better). Cyprus can boast that it currently deploys 50 percent of its target number of civilian experts with the European Union: but its target number is only four.

While these categories highlight member states’ differing capacities, they also highlight differing opinions on the value of individual EU missions. While France and Belgium are keen advocates of EU deployments in Africa, for example, many other governments view these as post-colonial

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distractions from higher strategic priorities. Britain favors the EU police missions to Iraq and the Palestinian Territories, which broadly fit with U.S. policy in these places. In June 2008, Portugal persuaded other member states to approve a security sector reform mission to its former colony

of Guinea-Bissau: almost all non-Portuguese European officials now describe this as a waste of money, and would like to see it closed.

Even where there is broad support for a mission, governments can clash over exactly how it should be used. This has come to the fore in Kosovo. Advocates of Kosovo’s independence, such as Britain, have pushed for the mission to do as much as possible to affirm the nascent state’s sovereignty. Those EU members that do not recognize Kosovo, most notably Spain, have put pressure on the mission to avoid doing exactly that. The net result is that EU officials on the ground have to ask for approval from Brussels on relatively minor decisions, for fear of offending one set of member states or the other.

Myth 3: With effective civilian missions, the EU can avoid military entanglements.

As we have observed, some European policymakers may think that civilian missions are a cheap alternative to military missions. There are certainly many things civilians can do less expensively than troops, but soldiers remain necessary. The European Union may deploy more civilian missions than military ones, but they are often protected by other organizations’ troops. The European Union could not send police advisers to the Congo if the UN did not have 20,000 soldiers there. It would have no personnel in Kabul if NATO was not there to defend it. Its work in Bosnia and Kosovo builds on years of UN and NATO peacekeeping.

European governments have, of course, contributed thousands of troops to NATO operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. The European Union sent military missions to back up the UN in Congo in 2003 and 2006. So there

should be no illusions in European capitals about the need to align military and civilian planning and operations—a lesson the United States learned in Iraq. But because European civilian and military efforts are so often channeled through different organizational routes, they often remain poorly connected. This lack of coordination is exacerbated by a formal block on EU-NATO cooperation due to disputes between Greece and Turkey.

Even in Bosnia, where the European Union has been responsible for military security as well as policing since 2004, the military and civilian chains of command remain separate. When one of the authors (Korski) served in Sarajevo, the EUSR, EU Force (EUFOR), and EU Police Mission often clashed over how aggressively to pursue criminals—and whether it was always necessary to build local capacity in the process. EU police officers were sometimes surprised to find their military colleagues staking out known criminals as part of an operation, about which neither the police officers nor their local counterparts had been informed. Ashton has reportedly instructed the Bosnian missions to improve their coordination.

Ashton has reportedly instructed the Bosnian missions to improve their coordination—which suggests that she grasps the importance not only of the European Union’s civilian capacities, but also of genuinely integrated civilian-military operations. If she can apply this insight more widely, this outlook will be a major advance in how the Union thinks about missions.

Myth-Busting: Preparing a New Generation of Civilian-military Operations

What can Lady Ashton and her colleagues do to prepare for the next generation of EU missions? We believe that they should urgently pursue three sets of priorities:

First, she must break the Bosnia template. To help the European Union move beyond the operational habits it learned in the Balkans, Ashton and EU member states should inaugurate a Working Group on Doctrine. This group should be tasked with producing an overarching EU doctrine for civilian-military operations in a year, on the basis of consultations within member states and discussions with NATO, the UN, and other significant operational actors. The Working Group should prioritize developing proposals applicable to high-risk theaters such as Somalia, Yemen, and Gaza.

Second, the differences between member states regarding civilian capacities need to be reduced. The European Union’s members are likely to hold very different views on where missions should deploy (and what they should prioritize) in the years ahead. But it is possible to narrow the differences between them in personnel selection, training and other technical matters. Ashton should lobby member states to found an EU Institute for Peace (based on the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C.) that can take responsibility for developing common training modules for all EU members, running “train the trainer” courses for national staff, and funding new research into how missions fail and succeed. She should also advocate a mentoring scheme: in which officials involved in civilian capacities among “The

Professionals” should be tasked with assisting their counterparts in governments struggling in this field.

Finally, divisions between civilian and military operations should be overcome. Ashton’s team must explore how to bridge the divide between civilian and military crisis management in EU thinking. This can, in part, be resolved through doctrine development and training, but it will also require addressing how EU missions are commanded. We believe that the European Union will ultimately need to end its practice of maintaining separate chains of command for military and civilian missions in cases like Bosnia. Instead, the European Council should invest command responsibility for all its personnel in a single EU Special Representative, answering to Ashton. Instead of dumping the EUSR system, Ashton should revise and strengthen it. Although the UN follows a similar approach, it is unpopular among many European soldiers, who fear that civilians fail to understand their needs. But only a single, civilian commander can guarantee that the European Union genuinely “does more with less,” aligning all its policy tools effectively.

Ashton can initiate these reforms, but only the European Union’s member states can make them work. There will most likely be resistance—but after the European Union’s difficulties in Afghanistan, there can be little doubt that it needs to rationalize its civilian capacities and missions. If it does not, it will have little chance of handling emerging crises like that in Yemen, and Europe’s civilian power will increasingly exist only in the realm of myth.



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