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**Engaging Regional Partners
for Effective Conflict Resolution:
Problems and Prospects of
the EU's Strategic Partnerships in Asia**

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Engaging Regional Partners for Effective Conflict Resolution: Problems and Prospects of the EU's Strategic Partnerships in Asia[♦]

Saponti Baroowa^{*}

Introduction: The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) as an Instrument of EU External Governance

From its initiation at the 1998 Franco-British Summit at St-Malo and its formalisation and institutionalisation at the Cologne and Helsinki Councils in 1999 to its 2005 monitoring mission in Aceh, Indonesia, the EU's ESDP has made considerable progress. In fact ESDP's fast institutional growth is seen as 'remarkable in a system where institutional change often proceeds at a glacial pace'.¹ Of course one may bear in mind that ESDP operations started on a small scale and with limited duration, and many of ESDP procedures still remain relatively untested.² Nevertheless, the ESDP's acquiring an operational capability in 2003, no matter in whatever small measure, marked a significant shift from the general nature of the development of CFSP which have 'often proceeded on the basis of rhetorical declarations followed by hesitant and inadequate implementation'.³ In 2003, apart from undertaking its first-ever civilian crisis management operation, the EU Police Mission in Bosnia Herzegovina (EUPM), and its first-ever military crisis management operation, *Concordia*, in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the EU, for the first time, extended its ESDP operations beyond Europe by undertaking a peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The military intervention involved 1,800 troops under the command and leadership of France and was known as *Operation Artemis*. It was also assembled in a very short period of time and involved all the member nations in the decision-making process. All previous operations involved 'a lengthy period of advance planning and have not really tested crisis decision-making capability'.⁴ *Operation Artemis* was therefore 'a undeniable success from the military point of view'.⁵ It also marked another first in that it was a fully autonomous EU crisis management operation without any recourse to NATO assets. Apart from the military dimension, the Congo operation was significant in that the EU adopted a three-pronged strategy as regards the civilian aspects of the intervention. This included the disarming, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups; preparation of a socio-economic rehabilitation program; and the granting of an immediate aid package. The operation was therefore the first concrete step towards implementing the EU's new security doctrine, 'by taking a much longer-term view on crisis management and conflict

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¹ Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor* (Routledge: London and New York, 2006), p.198.

² Antonio Missiroli, "ESDP-How it works" in Nicole Gnesotto (ed.), *EU Security and Defence Policy: The first five years* (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2004), p.66.

³ Bastian Giegerich and William Wallace, "Not Such a Soft Power: The External Deployment of European Forces", *Survival*, vol.46, no.2, Summer 2004, p.164.

⁴ Bretherton and Vogler, n.1, p.202.

⁵ Jean Yves-Haine, "ESDP: an Overview", Website of the European Union Institute for Security Studies, www.iss-eu.org

prevention'.⁶ Most significantly, the EU's successful Congo operation signaled the fact that the ESDP has now changed its dimension. It was no longer only a 'tool of crisis-management in the Balkans', but 'has become a necessary device to enhance Europe's role in the world'.⁷ This changed dimension also suggest that in future ESDP operations are likely to not only be limited to the 'theatre of necessity in the Balkans' but also extend to the 'theatre of choice' in other parts of the world thereby enabling the EU to become a more responsible global player.⁸ Significantly enough, in July 2005, the EU was engaged in another operation outside the territory of Europe and beyond its immediate neighbourhood, in Aceh, Indonesia. The Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) was given a robust mandate that included 'monitoring demobilization, decommissioning of arms, the withdrawal of government forces, the reintegration of former combatants and the launch of a new political process'.⁹

The Implications of ESDP's External Dimension for Asia

ESDP's external dimension received a fresh impetus in 2005 with the launching of its Aceh Monitoring Mission in the Aceh province of Indonesia. ESDP's first ever foray into Asia also marked another step in the direction of the EU attaining the status of a serious global actor and also introduced a new dimension to EU-Asia security relations. The robust mandate given to this new ESDP mission also meant that the EU was now faced with newer possibilities of emerging as an important security actor in Asia. It is significant to note that the EU, in association with the ASEAN, was the only international body accepted by all the parties of the Aceh conflict to oversee the implementation of the MoU between them. This is a pointer to 'a telling recognition of the international credibility of EU intervention under ESDP'.¹⁰

Although the AMM was to be ESDP's first foray into Asia, several EU Member States expressed their apprehension towards undertaking a mission in a region which was 10,000 miles away from home and which didn't constitute much of a European priority. Others however felt that 'a mission in Indonesia would match the vision of those who regarded the Union as a global player, not limited to stabilizing its neighbourhood but nurturing more ambitious goals'¹¹. The AMM was an EU-led ESDP mission but it was conducted together with five Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries, namely Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, and with contributions from Norway and Switzerland.

The mandate entrusted to the AMM as part of the MoU and as outlined in the Council Joint Action of 9 September 2005 involved some demanding and sensitive tasks on the ground for the EU Mission.¹² In fact, on the ground the AMM's activities and responsibilities extended beyond the initial provisions. For instance, it was envisaged that the AMM's task would be to monitor decommissioning but later on it emerged that the AMM was to take charge of the decommissioning process itself largely due to the apprehension of the GAM fighters to hand over their weapons to the Indonesian forces and therefore their preference for a reliable and impartial third party.¹³

Despite some initial pre-launch institutional deadlocks and confusions as regards logistics and finances, the AMM got underway as planned. The Aceh Conflict was not only a test case of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jean Yves-Haine, "An Historical Perspective", in Nicole Gnesotto (ed.), *ESDP: The First Five Years* (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies) 2004, p.53.

⁹ Pierre-Antoine Braud and Giovanni Grevi, "The EU Mission in Aceh: implementing peace", *Occasional Paper 61*, (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2004), December 2005, p.3.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 36.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 22.

¹² Council Joint Action 2005/643/CFSP, 9 September 2005. OJ L234/13

¹³ Braud and Grevi, n.9, p. 28.

the security-development nexus in Asia in that the conflict owes its origins so much to the political and economic mis-governance of the central authority as to the regional quest for identity and socio-economic self-determination but also in that the devastation brought about by the Asian Tsunami reinforced the development woes of the region. Therefore leadership of the AMM provided a real opportunity to the EU to address a potent situation of the security-development nexus in the Asian continent. For, the EU soon found out that it was not only the main external organization monitoring peace but also one of the main providers of humanitarian assistance and development aid. Aceh also became a test case where both Community (Development Aid) and Council (ESDP Missions) instruments could be applied to address the larger issues of the security and development in regions outside Europe. Aceh proved how both set of instruments could be complementary and mutually reinforcing. The EU had to recognize the interplay between the reconstruction efforts and the initiatives to put an end to the conflict in Aceh, and therefore had to strike the right balance, for instance, ‘in the aid provided to the coastal population, most hit by the tsunami, and to the population of the mainland, which suffered the most from the civil war. EU action must be clearly and perceivably directed at building the future of the entire region, and not of one particular area or social component.’¹⁴ In the final analysis the Aceh experience showed how the EU could combine all the instruments in its tool box towards not only securing immediate peace and development but also towards developing and sustaining long-term security.

The EU’s Strategy and Approach towards Asia and Asian Security

In its very first report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1997, the Council made it clear that ‘Asia continues to constitute key priority for the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy’¹⁵ Earlier in 1994, the European Commission (EC) produced an overall approach to Asia (including Australasia) in a document titled *Towards a New Asia Strategy*, and followed this up in 2001 with a revised and new policy document titled *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships*. The latter signified a more robust EU approach because it emphasised the importance of the security dimension as well in relations with Asia. The document subdivides Asia into four sub regions: South Asia, South East Asia, North East Asia and Australasia.¹⁶ Of the six broad objectives spelt out by the document, from the security point of view, mention may be made of the EU’s aim to: a) ‘contribute to peace and security in the region and globally, through a broadening of our engagement with the region’; b) ‘contribute to the protection of human rights and to the spreading of democracy, good governance and the rule of law’; and c) ‘to build global partnerships and alliances with Asian countries...to strengthen our joint efforts on global environmental and security issues’.¹⁷ Also a European Parliament (EP) Study of 1999 called for a more active ‘involvement of the CFSP in ‘Asian’ security issues, for instance in the areas of confidence-building, proactive and preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution’.¹⁸ The significance of real and potential conflict in some of Asia’s prolonged flashpoints remains high for Europe. This is apparent from ‘the indication, often heard in EP and in EU security circles, that the 1992 Petersberg Declaration...may well be worth emulating in connection with conflict resolution in Asia’.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid 29-30.

¹⁵ Annual Report CFSP 1997, Council of Ministers, point 15a.

¹⁶ European Commission, *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships*, Brussels 4.9.2001, COM(2001) 469 final, p.3.

<http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/asia/doc/com01_469_en.pdf, 18/04/2006>

¹⁷ Ibid., p.15.

¹⁸ Georg Wiessala, *More than Distant Neighbours: CFSP and Asian Countries*, in: Martin Holland (ed.), *Common Foreign and Security Policy: The first ten years*, 2nd Edition, London/New York 2004), p.96.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.97.

Potential and Parameters of the EU's Engagement in Asian Security Scenarios

There is a general agreement in EU strategic discourse that in the conduct of its external relations, the EU had successfully maintained its civilian image of a responsible international actor firmly committed to the norms of international stability informed by the principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter. In fact, 'UN-centrism in European security cooperation in Asia could offer an alternative Western identity for Europe in Asia and strengthen the EU's image as a more independent security actor in the region'.²⁰ It has also been argued that 'Europe should seek constructive involvement in Asian preventive diplomacy and try to utilize its expertise in the field of "soft security" which uses civilian means instead of military means'.²¹ In fact, ESDP's experiences in conflict resolution and crisis management, together with its frequent use of civilian measures, can provide a comparative advantage to the EU to constructively develop a culture of security cooperation with Asia in the field of crisis management. It has also been suggested that, rather than developing new structures, the EU's main policy in Asia 'should be related to the strengthening of the development of the existing security institutionalization in Asia'.²² To this end, the EU 'should give sufficient priority to official Asian security dialogue forums such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)'.²³

Although since the early 1990s the EU had expressed a strong desire in widening the security agenda in its relations with ASEAN, the non-compatible security cultures between the two organizations meant that 'for most of the 1990s the EU and ASEAN could not find any common ground on conflicting issues such as the liberalization and democratization of authoritarian regimes, human rights, sustainable development, and 'good governance'.²⁴ In recent times, however, there is a growing acceptance of the importance of non-traditional security on the ASEAN side as a result of a changing security culture resulting in an ongoing process of harmonization of Asian and European security cultures.²⁵ Till the ARF does not evolve mechanisms for preventive diplomacy, the EU can perhaps insist on cooperation on soft security issues, and the experiences of ESDP's civilian instruments may prove beneficial. For the EU therefore, Asia is the most challenging test case for building regional security arrangements.²⁶ The EU keeps its out-of-area ESDP missions open to participation by other regional and extra-regional states. 'But to give meaning to ideas such as "African ownership" and "open coalitions", the EU needs to channel more resources and expertise to regional organizations in the developing world'.²⁷

It is also imperative for the EU to practically harmonize its instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention within a larger framework of a human security approach which envisages insecurity as emanating from not only underdevelopment and violent conflict situations but also from situations arising due to such events as natural disasters, environmental crises and pandemics. In the Asian context, countries in the region are increasingly beginning to realize the implications of the human security dimension. Most South East Asian nations have generally regarded economic development and prosperity as the cornerstone of their national

²⁰ Timo Kivimaki and Jorgen Delman (ed.), *The Security Situation in Asia: Changing Regional Security Structure?*, Copenhagen 2005, p.xi.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.iv.

²² *Ibid.*, p.v.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Jorn Dosch, *Changing Security Cultures in Europe and Southeast Asia*, *Asia-Europe Journal*, vol.1, no.4., December 2003, p.494.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.486.

²⁶ Amitav Acharya, *An Asian Perspective: Regional security arrangements in a multipolar world: the EU's contribution*, in :Martin Ortega (ed.), *Global Views on the European Union*, Chaillot Paper 72, Paris November 2004, p.93.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.100.

security and have therefore increasingly realized that it is imperative for them to cooperate on human security questions as well. For, any major environmental or human security crisis in one country may well have transboundary implications and therefore risk economic growth and security of their whole region. Therefore in addressing human security issues, the EU can condition its security and development strategies in far-flung Asian regions towards collaborating with regional and local actors in mitigating and preventing environmental crises and life-threatening epidemics.

The EU, India and China: Challenges and Opportunities

The EU's growing experience in civilian and humanitarian crisis management may prove beneficial in evolving common strategies with India or China towards addressing humanitarian crises-like situations with regional implications. Any direct EU involvement on the ground may also introduce a multilateral dimension to any regional humanitarian crisis management operation and help in ameliorating the fears and distrust among smaller nations, especially in the context of South Asia. In recent years, the emerging political relations between the EU and India have also shown greater signs of maturity with the two sides increasingly exhibiting a greater understanding of each other's approach to the erstwhile difficult issues on such questions as related to terrorism and human rights.

For India, the 'EU's influence, in not only the regional but the global security arrangement, is and will become incrementally significant, both in terms of its own collective regional identity and through the UN.²⁸ Moreover Europe's economic and strategic interests in Central Asia and the Gulf impinge on India's parallel interests in the same region.²⁹ It would therefore be in India's larger interests to fashion bilateral relations with the EU in view of its emergence as a new "pole" in an evolving multipolar world and in keeping with the changing realities of the international political and economic order.³⁰

The EU for its part also started to recognize India as an emerging global player and an important regional power in Asia and therefore vital for its "New Asia Strategy" which seeks to improve the EU's economic and political profile in Asia. In a significant break from the past when India was not considered part of Asia and considered too obsessed with its own problems, the EU increasingly began to view India as a nation which was now looking beyond its borders and comparing itself with the outside world. India's "Look East" policy was a case in point. The EU also regarded India as one of the world's largest emerging economies whose largely untapped market offered immense opportunities. India on the other hand all the more realized the importance of the economic nature of the relations.

The decision to hold regular summits between India and the EU as part of their evolving Strategic Partnership seem to have corrected 'a distortion that seemed to have crept in with the absurdity of India's exclusion from a summit-level Europe-Asia consultation.'³¹ The Summit level interactions also revealed a lot of scope for greater understanding of India's position in contrast to earlier attitudes. For instance, the EU increasingly began to recognize India's concerns on terrorism although the fact remains that India's approach to terrorism which emphasizes more focused and straight-forward solutions do not go down well with the European approach which exhibits much more restraint in matters related to terrorism. While most European governments would emphasize more on addressing the factors that give rise to terrorism, the Indian position emphasizes on the need to arrest terrorism in all its forms irrespective of whatever causes and motives that may be involved. These apparent differences notwithstanding, India and EU tried to

²⁸ Dixit, 'Cooperation with Europe: Market and More', (10 July 2000) *Indian Express*

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ 'Editorial' (30 June 2000) *The Hindu*

³¹ Editorial (1 July 2000) *The Hindu*

arrive at some semblance of a common ground as one could gather from the wordings in the EU-India Joint Declaration at the end of the Lisbon Summit. It declared that both India and the EU ‘reaffirm our unreserved condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, wherever it occurs and whatever its motives and origin...’³² The EU also backed India’s proposal for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. The two sides also recognized ‘the need to work together more closely to promote peace, stability and security in their respective regions and beyond through bilateral dialogue and confidence building measures among the countries concerned.’ While stating their conviction that ‘co-operation in multilateral fora should be one of the priorities in the future development of our relationship,’ India and the EU also reaffirmed their ‘commitment to co-operating closely in identifying and furthering common interests in international organizations, particularly in the framework of the United Nations, and in the ASEAN Regional Forum.’

The most seminal text outlining a comprehensive strategic partnership arrangement between India and the EU, was in the form of the European Commission’s Communication on ‘An EU-India Strategic Partnership’ of June 2004. The Communication stated that owing to the emerging global profile of both the EU and India, the focus of their ‘relations has shifted from trade to wider political issues’ and therefore it is necessary to reinforce the already existing cooperation at the UN and other fora by ‘a strategic alliance for the promotion of an effective multilateral approach.’³³ It was further stated that India and the EU ‘should co-ordinate and harmonize positions in the preparation, negotiation and implementation of major multilateral conventions’ especially in the fields of security, trade, human rights, environment and development.³⁴ Also India and the EU should co-operate on ‘organizational and institutional restructuring and reform of the United Nations’ and work towards promoting ‘effective multilateralism, especially on implementation of international obligations and commitments and the strengthening of global governance.’³⁵ The proposal therefore laid down the EU’s resolve to develop a strategic partnership with India in several key areas.³⁶ Firstly, the proposal envisaged cooperation, especially in multilateral fora, on conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction; non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction; the fight against terrorism and organized crime; democracy and human rights; and peace and stability in South Asia.

Already the two sides have also expressed their desire to ‘establish an EU-India security dialogue on global and regional security issues, disarmament, and non-proliferation.’³⁷ The current political dialogue under the broad framework of the emerging India-EU Strategic Partnership may offer future possibilities to both India and the EU to evolve strategies of potential cooperation in the field of crisis management.³⁸

One should also note that there are different strategic interests and priorities in the EU, India and China. Hence the main practical significance for the EU in evolving strategic partnerships is to promote responsibility and to co-opt India and China to work together toward a more rule-based international order.

While recognizing the significance of the upgrade of India-EU relations to the level of a strategic partnership, one should however not miss the point that ‘a certain degree of mutual

³² ‘India-EU Joint Declaration’ (Lisbon, 28th June 2000)

<www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/india/intro/index.htm>

³³ European Commission, Communication to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee, ‘An EU-India Strategic Partnership’ (16 June 2004) COM (2004) 430 final 3

³⁴ *ibid* 4

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *ibid* 4-10

³⁷ European Council Brussels, 7 September 2005, Political Declaration on India-EU Strategic Partnership, in: EU Security and Defence: Core Documents 2005, Vol VI, Chaillot Paper 87, Paris March 2006, p.248.

³⁸ For an analysis of the EU-India Strategic Partnership, see Saponti Baroowa, The Emerging Strategic Partnership between India and the European Union: A Critical Appraisal, European Law Journal, Vol.13, No.6, Oxford 2007, pp.732-749.

neglect and lack of attention characterizes Indo-EU relations leading at times to greater declarations of intent rather than specific agendas'.³⁹ This can be attributed partly to 'differing priorities and preoccupation with more pressing political agendas nearer home'.⁴⁰ Moreover, there is an implicit preference to engage with China on more constructive terms than with India. In fact, the 'number of officials in the Commission dealing with India is only a handful; far less in their number and profile to those dealing with China'.⁴¹ This 'problem is compounded by the fact that there is an inadequate number of experts who are capable to understand the complex problems that India confronts today'.⁴² The 'India-EU strategic partnership is unlikely to be at the same level as China even though India does not have the problems encountered in the relationship with China', especially as regards human rights, the arms embargo, and the Chinese army's growing capabilities in relation to Taiwan.⁴³ A concomitant problem is that there 'is often a significant difference between the institutions that are keen to move forward with the strategic partnership with India and conservative Member States who are apprehensive to give institutions too much room to negotiate analogously'.⁴⁴

Despite their long-standing bi-lateral disputes recent years have seen the emergence of effective confidence building measures between India and China. China has also increasingly begun to view India less as a rival and more as a potentially strong economic and trade partner. Although both countries may be seen to be continually trying to exert individual influence among smaller nations in regions along their peripheries, the real potential for India-China collaboration lies not so much in the resolution of violent conflicts but in addressing human security issues such as environmental degradation, natural disasters, epidemics, drugs and migration. The EU along with the ASEAN, India and China can potentially forge a symbiotic partnership in addressing such questions related to security and development in Asia.

Conclusion

The roots of regional instability may be complex and may not be merely economic or over the control of resources. Some may go back many centuries into history and many may be deep-rooted in differences of culture, ethnicity, religion, and language. Mere economic instruments and top-down approaches may only put many of the unresolved animosities into deep freeze where they may fester and attain greater and unmanageable proportions. Therefore institutional capacity-building from below which takes into account local realities and recognizes the uniqueness of each region's own development process should be encouraged.

Greater integration in the national mainstream of troubled regions may not be enough as it may only continue the political and economic alienation but instead, elements of opportunities should be identified whereby these backward regions may be integrated in a larger regional and transnational system. This would not be antithetical to national interests or sovereignty as some in governing establishments would like to believe but would lead to a kind of placebo effect in the short-term and sustainable development and security in the long-term.

The EU, for its part, could contribute towards a greater sharing of experiences and expertise with regional actors, thereby leading to effective partnerships towards finding viable solutions. An alternative approach would be to address the root causes of instability and promote

³⁹ Jain, 'India and the European Union: Challenges and Opportunities', in Rajendra K Jain (ed), *India and the European Union in the New Millennium* (Radiant, 2000) p 89

⁴⁰ *ibid* p 99

⁴¹ Jain, 'India and the European Union: The Parameters and Potential of Strategic Partnership', in Rajendra K Jain (ed), *India and the European Union* (Radiant, 2007) p. 75

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ *ibid* 73-74

⁴⁴ *ibid*

development by engaging regional partner countries to integrate troubled regions in mutually benefiting economic and trading systems.

In the final analysis, in order to bring its Development and Security policies in line, the EU, in addition to its existing development assistance programs in underdeveloped but more stable regions, should also allocate greater resources to current and potential conflict prone regions. Such an approach would introduce the much-needed development dimension to the prevalent security-informed conflict mitigation efforts in such troubled regions. The EU should therefore combine its development resources and security instruments towards a more long-term global crisis response and development approach rather than resorting to reactive *ad-hoc* arrangements in select situations.

The EU lacks a coherent policy towards Asia, and the AMM was the result of not any coherent EU policy but mainly due to the fact that the two main external actors in the region, namely, the United States and Australia both discredited themselves in their involvements in Iraq and East Timor respectively. It is also a fact that many Member States were reluctant to support the AMM, in a region far away from the EU and with no real European interests. Aceh may therefore be viewed as an exception and a contingency but it may also be argued that such contingencies also provide the real opportunity to the EU to devise a more comprehensive and durable approach if the Union is to ultimately emerge as a responsible global actor. The Aceh experience can very well provide a direction which could perhaps inform the growth of future EU strategies towards addressing issues of security and development in far-flung regions as in Asia and elsewhere.