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To cite this article: Feyyaz Barış Çelik (2020): Foreign policy decision-making in operational overlap: the UK's policing assistance in Afghanistan through the EU and NATO, *European Security*, DOI: [10.1080/09662839.2020.1784143](https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2020.1784143)

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Foreign policy decision-making in operational overlap: the UK's policing assistance in Afghanistan through the EU and NATO

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally seen as an interlocutor between Europe and the US in transatlantic security relations, the UK's engagement with the training of the Afghan National Police (ANP) through the concurrent EU and NATO missions presents an interesting case of foreign policy decision-making. Although a logic based on broader British orientations about the roles of the two organisations expect that the UK's primary institution of choice would be NATO, London supported both missions in providing international policing assistance to Afghanistan. Adopting an operational overlap perspective, this article seeks to explain the UK's strategic behaviour vis-a-vis the EU and NATO training missions that have been simultaneously involved in overlapping tasks, despite the initial intention that the two missions would undertake different and complementary roles. Analysing evidence from the UK Parliament and Government, US diplomatic missions, the EU and NATO, as well as interviews with former UK and NATO officials, this article argues that while providing training to the Afghan police, London focused on these missions' practical outputs rather than preferring an organisation of choice as such. This strategy is mainly guided by the UK's concern to uphold counter-narcotics enforcement in Afghanistan and to fulfil transition tasks during the incremental withdrawal of British troops.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 January 2020

Accepted 15 June 2020

KEYWORDS

EU; NATO; Afghanistan; foreign policy analysis; governmental politics; operational overlap

1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) have conducted a number of crisis management operations in different parts of the world. Although there were calls for a division of labour and complementarity between these two organisations and their operations, an interesting point is that some of these operations have been simultaneously active in the same places. For instance, between 2005 and 2007, as a response to the African Union's (AU) calls for logistic support to move its peacekeeping forces to the Darfur region, they operated separate airlifts in Sudan at the same time. When NATO launched a mission to train the Afghan police and military in 2009, there was already a mission under the EU flag to train Afghan police officers. The two organisations decided to address maritime piracy in the Gulf of Aden through separate operations that ran at the same time. They also had naval operations in the

Mediterranean to tackle the issues related to human smuggling, among other tasks. Although some of these temporally and geographically proximate EU and NATO operations were initially intended to address different areas of a security issue, some of their activities came to overlap with one another. By focusing on the operational overlap, this article seeks to explain the way in which the United Kingdom (UK) has engaged with the EU and NATO police training missions in Afghanistan.

Traditionally seen as an interlocutor between Europe and the US in the transatlantic security context, the UK preferences demonstrate varying extents and strategies of engaging with the overlapping EU and NATO operations. For instance, in the case of the EU and NATO counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the UK initially preferred to respond to the issue through the NATO operation, then led the EU operation by committing an Operational Headquarters as well as a commander, and deployed warships to both operations over time (Willett 2011, p. 23). As this article shows, in Afghanistan, the UK adopted a specific model of engagement with the EU and NATO training missions by attempting to use the practical outputs of these missions for different purposes.

Dynamics within national decision-making processes regarding the EU and NATO operations with overlapping mandates and capabilities remain relatively less explored despite the existing research on operational dynamics within these interventions (e.g. Græger 2014, 2016, 2017, Gebhard and Smith 2015, Mayer 2017, Smith and Gebhard 2017). Processes both before and during these operations entail important decisions for member states, as the capabilities possessed by these operations often rely on the same reservoir of resources that can be (or have already been) made available to both operations (e.g. Howorth 2003, Schleich 2014, Smith 2015, Koops 2017). In order to analyse the UK's engagement¹ with these operations, this article builds an analytical tool by first drawing on two dimensions that played an important role in theoretical paradigms of international relations: the internal or external dimension (what states seek to respond through foreign policy), and the material or ideational dimension (the underlying logic behind implementing a foreign policy). The article then subsumes the approaches offered by the literature on member states' and more particularly the UK's strategies vis-à-vis the crisis management operations of the EU and NATO under four headings: security interests, domestic-level preferences, transatlantic relations and identities. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to existing literature first by systematically categorising the most frequent propositions within this literature as potential drivers of national strategies, and second by fleshing out the processes through which these propositions may guide national preferences regarding these operations. Its empirical contribution lies in its application of a "governmental politics" perspective to the ways in which member states make decisions about the EU and NATO crisis response operations with several intersections.

As a case study, this article conducts an in-depth analysis of the UK's engagement with EU and NATO police training missions in Afghanistan. A logic based on the UK's broader orientations about the crisis management roles of the EU and NATO would expect that the UK's primary organisation of choice would be NATO. However, this article shows that, rather than preferring an organisation of choice as such, London adopted a flexible model of engagement focused on the practical outputs of the EU and NATO missions. It is argued that this mode of engagement with these missions is informed initially by the UK's attempt to uphold counter-narcotics enforcement in Afghanistan and then by an agenda of fulfilling transition tasks of transferring security responsibilities to Afghan forces.

This article starts by outlining the rationale behind a perspective based on the operational overlap as well as studying the UK decision-making regarding EU and NATO police training missions in Afghanistan. The article then sets out the analytical framework. Proceeding with the case study, the article concludes with the implications of the present analysis, and some suggestions for future research.

2. An overlap perspective on EU and NATO operations

Echoing a broader debate on the concept of “overlap” within the interorganisational relations literature (Peters 2004, Biermann 2008, Koops 2017), the overlap between the crisis response operations of the EU and NATO has been widely debated in terms of a “division of labour”. For some scholars, there has been a de facto partition of work between these operations, as NATO performs higher intensity tasks of peace enforcement and peacekeeping, while the EU has more strength in the lower range of conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict management (Galbreath and Gebhard 2010, Smith 2011, Græger 2014, Schleich 2014, Gebhard and Smith 2015). For others, the overlap on the basis of crisis response operations has impeded an efficient division of labour between the two organisations due to a lack of formal cooperation as well as member states’ cross-institutional strategies (Hofmann 2009). In short, the mere existence of overlap may lead to rivalry, cooperation or to a division of labour (Koops 2017, p. 326).

Despite this burgeoning research examining the concept of overlap in operational dynamics, relatively less explored is the variation in member state engagement with these operations with a focus on relevant national decision-making processes. Admittedly, analysing the concept of operational overlap by looking at the national decision-making stages faces some challenges. Firstly, it should be recognised that the EU and NATO operations with temporal and spatial proximity do not necessarily intersect exactly in the same sequence of national decision-making processes. In other words, member states do not always articulate their preferences regarding these operations simultaneously. Yet, the operational overlap complex presents several puzzles for national decision-makers.

Although the planning processes of overlapping EU and NATO operations might initially propose a partition of work between these operations, these operations can be involved in the same tasks after the planning processes. For instance, the EU and NATO training missions in Afghanistan were planned to focus on different elements of the Afghan National Security Forces, but over time, they came to deliver training and mentoring for the same elements of the Afghan police. In such an overlap, member states interested in maintaining control of policy space in one organisation at the expense of the other may benefit from this overlap, whereas those willing to demonstrate solidarity with both organisations may be challenged especially when there is fragmentation between the operations. Furthermore, according to an operational overlap perspective, at the time of the launch of an EU or NATO operation, there is at least one operation deployed by the other organisation in the same area to address a similar, or even the same, issue. Thus, options about one of the operations enter into a member state’s agenda when it already has some sort of knowledge about, and in some cases even engagement with, the other operation in place. This matters for member states, not least because national support to a particular operation is not equivalent to resourcing it, as planning and force generation processes are concurrent but separate processes

both in the EU and NATO operations (Toczek 2006, p. 62, Ginsberg and Penska 2012). Hence, even though member states can take part in temporally overlapping planning processes of these operations, they can still choose the most convenient operational arrangements when they make their participation decisions to these operations that have been simultaneously active in the same places with separate chains of command and contingents of troops. Furthermore, there is empirical evidence that member states can concurrently take part in the planning of overlapping EU and NATO operations, such as the operational context in this article, namely the training missions in Afghanistan (for a recent study on more cases of overlapping operations, see Fahron-Hussey 2019).

It should also be noted that a comprehensive account of national preferences would necessitate a multi-level analysis, not least because member states define their preferences before coming to the international negotiating table and they subsequently discuss potential deals that are in line with their interests (Chelotti 2016, Nováky 2018). Whilst the institutional-level factors can in fact influence the broader international rhetoric before member states, national political will is central to the processes both before and during the operations (Auerswald and Saideman 2014, Ginsberg and Penska 2012, Howorth 2017, Mello and Saideman 2019).

In this understanding, this article will examine the UK's decision-making by deploying a governmental politics perspective. As an explanatory approach, governmental politics essentially refers to the impact of national bureaucracies on foreign policy decision-making by highlighting the institutionally driven nature of foreign policy making (Allison and Zelikow 1999). Yet, rather than adopting governmental politics as an explanatory tool, this article uses it as a conceptual lens for the empirical investigation at the *intra*-governmental level (Kaarbo 1998, p. 73, Gross 2009, Alden and Aran 2017). Governmental politics as an empirical perspective is particularly relevant for national decision-making cases within operational overlaps, as different national agencies can have responsibilities about their government's operational contributions to overlapping operations. For instance, the overlap between the EU and NATO training missions in Afghanistan has created a decision-making situation in the UK, where British contributions to the EU mission were supported mainly by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office, while the UK's contributions to the NATO mission were led by the Ministry of Defence (Sinclair 2015, email communication with MoD). As well as creating a division of labour between different Whitehall stakeholders, this also creates a decision-making situation in which various departments with potentially different interests are involved in the UK's decision-making processes related to these missions. In this respect, the aim is to identify the participant individuals and organisations in the decision-making process, factors that shaped their perceptions, preferences and stands, determinants of their impact on results and the combinations of stands, influences and moves that result in decisions and actions.

Afghanistan as a theatre of overlapping operations is selected as it epitomises a complex environment where multiple national and international stakeholders contributed to the long-term reconstruction efforts. This makes it possible to gauge the explanatory power of security interests, domestic-level preferences, transatlantic relations and identities. Admittedly, focusing only on the UK's engagement can limit the generalisation of the findings to other member states. However, an in-depth investigation and analysis of a complex network of multiple national bureaucracies in an operational context where

both the EU and NATO were involved would necessitate a much larger project than a journal article. Moreover, using the single case of the UK can illustrate how an interlocutor between Europe and the US (as well as between the EU and NATO) in the transatlantic security context can shape its strategies vis-à-vis the EU and NATO and the two organisations' crisis management operations (Smith 2010; Chappell et al. 2016; Whitman and Tonra 2017). An analysis of operational overlap from the UK perspective is also relevant given the UK's navigation towards becoming a third country to the EU. This process raises questions about how London will channel its efforts to shape the agendas of both the EU and NATO to further British interests given, among other things, a recently ignited strategic cooperation between the two organisations (Council 2016, 2018). Within this understanding, in order to analyse the UK decision-making context and governmental stakeholders' views within it, the primary sources this article analyses are inquiries of the House of Commons and House of Lords select committees², the UK Government's letters and responses, US cables of the time, official EU and NATO documents such as mission mandates and factsheets and interviews with former UK and NATO officials. Secondary sources analysed in this research are research articles and policy reports produced by think tanks.

3. Potential drivers of the UK's engagement with overlapping EU and NATO operations

The potential drivers of a member state's engagement with overlapping EU and NATO operations reflect the dimensions that functioned as two of the major lines of division in theoretical paradigms of international relations and foreign policy analysis: internal or external (what states seek to respond through certain foreign policy actions) and material or ideational (the underlying logic of states' action). These drivers are also relevant for the UK's international policing assistance in Afghanistan through the EU and NATO, as "the rationales underpinning the UK's delivery of international policing are generally articulated through foreign policy and international agreements relating to defence, diplomacy, and the strengthening of fragile states" (Sinclair 2015, p. 416).

The internal/external dimension evokes the conceptual and theoretical debates within the foreign policy analysis literature (Brighi and Hill 2016). Issues to which states respond when engaging with crisis response operations may be internal to them such as public opinion and the power-sharing dynamics within domestic bureaucracies (Auerswald and Saideman 2014). External dynamics can include balance-of-threat, alliance dependence or the symbolic value of collective action (Bennett et al. 1994, p. 50). The dimension between ideational and material motivations is based on a debate between those who emphasise the relative distribution of capabilities between sovereign states and those who emphasise ideas, norms and shared knowledge (Flockhart 2016). According to the first view, bargaining between states are the outcomes of the relative cost of opportunities and threats, "which is directly proportional to the distribution of material resources" (Legro and Moravcsik 1999, pp. 16–17). From an ideational perspective, institutional factors such as rules, ideas, values and common understandings are also to be taken into account (Caporoso 1999, p. 627).

As will become clear in the next section, potential drivers of the UK's engagement with overlapping EU and NATO operations can be located along these two dimensions. The UK's

actions can be guided by internal purposes with a material logic, for instance, if certain EU and NATO operations align with the governmental stakeholders' interests of increasing their role or the resources they control (domestic-level preferences). The UK can also respond to an internal issue through an ideational logic, such as pursuing its own orientations about concepts such as the use of force (identities). When the UK's action has primarily external functions, these can be guided by a security-based motivation such as responding to a threat emanating from abroad (security interests) or real-time calculations or broader strategic attitudes about the crisis management roles of the EU and NATO (transatlantic relations). Finally, an external motivation through an ideational logic would be observable if the UK seeks to pursue an external agenda such as promoting certain norms through the EU and NATO (identities). This yields the below diagram which locates the four propositions along the internal/external and ideational/material dimensions (Figure 1).

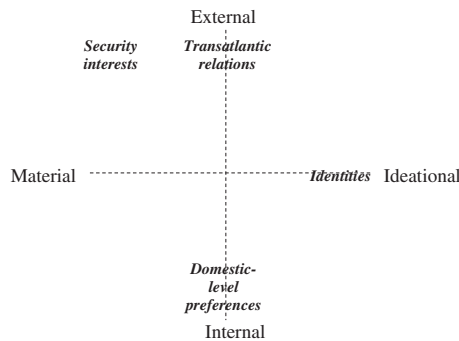


Figure 1. Locating the propositions along the two dimensions.

This being said, these analytical categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, not least because foreign policy is performed by various actors within both domestic and international environments and it can be shaped by both material and ideational factors (Flockhart 2016). Yet, some nuances can suggest that certain propositions can be more prominent than others in explaining member state preferences. Hence, a key concern in this article is assessing “the overall pattern of results and the degree to which the observed pattern matches the predicted one” in order to identify the preeminent triggers of member state action (Yin 2009, p. 140).

3.1. Security interests

Because some crisis response operations are of necessity and others are by choice, a key question regarding not only the UK's but also other member states' decisions about intervening in third states through the EU and NATO operations is who/what a member state seeks to secure when engaging with these operations. Yet, this can lead to an extremely broad concept of security, which may compromise the parsimony of analysis. Hence, in operationalising “security interests”, this article focuses on the concept of “threat”, not least because “security only makes sense against the background of threats” (Schmidt 2016, p. 207). In this understanding, security interests as used in this article refer to the UK's motivation to eliminate *direct* threats against its physical security or economic wealth emanating from outside its borders (Legro and Moravcsik 1999). This way of

operationalisation helps distinguish security interests from other threats such as poverty, environmental degradation and repression of human rights, which while they may affect the UK's interests, do not spring from a direct threat to the rather unambiguous conception of security interests as described above (Mattelaer 2013, pp. 73–74).

In this sense, explanations that could be classified under the heading of security interests suggest that the UK contributes to these operations as a response to actual or potential, but direct, threats to Britain's physical security, economy or a natural resource of major economic or security significance (Davidson 2011). In other words, rather than an institution of choice per se, the UK's engagement with overlapping EU and NATO operations is informed by the degree to which a given operation addresses a direct threat to Britain's security interests.

This leads to a number of intervening factors that link the UK's security interests to its decisions about engaging with operations. The first of these is the perceived ability of operations to address an external threat as well as the resources possessed by the operations. For instance, in Afghanistan, the UK might have attempted to use the EU's civilian expertise that was seen as suitable for its counter-narcotics mission (Farrell 2017). In contrast, when an operation encounters resource problems such as personnel and financial shortcomings, which also became the case in the EU's police training mission in Afghanistan (Coelmont 2009), the UK can tend to play down that operation because it cannot be instrumentalised for the elimination of a perceived security threat.

Secondly, the functionality of operations judged against the differences between mandates can also link security interests to the UK's operational decisions. If an operation has a weak or vague mandate that fails to robustly address the security issue in question, inefficiencies on the operational ground can occur (Juncos 2018). For instance, in the context of counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the EU's legal agreements with third countries in the region or its capacity development aid sometimes led the UK to prefer the EU over the NATO operation, which had a more limited mandate (HoC Foreign Affairs Committee 2011c, Nováky 2018).

It is worth noting that security-related factors can be interrelated with ideational facets of the UK's decisions, not least because policymakers can use security- and ethically-based reference frames simultaneously. As Tony Blair (1999) once indicated, "the spread of our values makes us safer". Yet, propositions based on security interests work from the standpoint that ethical considerations serve as a means of responding to external security threats. In other words, these considerations are framed as instruments in support of security interests, rather than independent ends in themselves (Gilmore 2014, p. 24).

Hence, in order for propositions related to security interests to be vindicated, there should be evidence that the UK's strategies vis-à-vis overlapping EU and NATO operations are primarily informed by a willingness to eliminate an external threat to its physical or economic security (Figure 2).

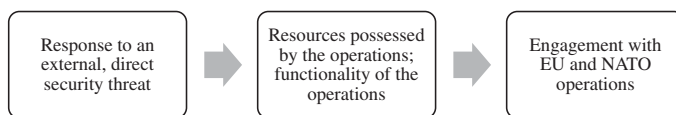


Figure 2. Influence pattern of security interests.

3.2. Domestic-level preferences

Existence of an external threat is not always sufficient to understand the UK's preferences on overlapping EU and NATO operations. According to the second set of propositions, namely domestic-level preferences, when there is no clearly identifiable security threats and exogenous pressures, the UK may focus on the domestic political risks and opportunities of a foreign policy decision (Pohl 2014, p. 192).

Although there are several intervening factors that can link a member state's domestic-level preferences to its engagement with the EU and NATO operations, we can mainly categorise them as prestige and veto players. Prestige refers to "the perceptions of other states with respect to a state's capacities and its ability and willingness to exercise its power" (Gilpin 1981, p. 31). In this sense, the UK can instrumentalise an operation for projecting a positive image vis-à-vis its domestic audience or for the recognition of its relative power on the international stage, such as its decision as a major naval power to act against Somali piracy both via the EU and NATO to maintain its own credibility on the high seas (Germond and Smith 2009, Gegout 2012).

The second set of domestic-level factors, namely veto players, are conceptualised as individuals or collective actors whose agreement is required for a change of the status quo and who have different requirements for survival than a state understood as a unitary actor (Tsebelis 1995). This is particularly relevant for the present case study, as the absence of a central "national police service" in the UK leads to a cross-departmental approach within Whitehall in terms of international policing assistance (Sinclair 2015, p. 416).

Organisations within the government, comprised by the bureaucracy as one of the largest and most influential interest groups in the decision-making process, are important veto players. Accordingly, interests and attitudes of the agencies within the UK's foreign policy bureaucracies can help explain Britain's vis-à-vis the overlapping EU and NATO operations. Existing research shows that certain domestic actors can emphasise fostering the EU integration in security and defence matters, while others might have an organisational understanding which aligns with NATO (Mérand 2010, Biehl et al. 2013, Dyson 2014, Wright 2019). For example, some analysts assert that policy orientations of the Ministry of Defence tend to be closer to NATO, while the Foreign and Commonwealth Office inclines to be more EU-oriented (O'Donnell 2011, Aktipis and Oliver 2012). Furthermore, existing beliefs within the UK's political parties' traditions can be influential in British political governance, in turn affecting the UK's broad strategic orientations as well as its momentous foreign policy decisions (Gaskarth 2013, p. 54, Hofmann 2013).

Moreover, government departments can also act as veto players when certain operations make their mobilisation more difficult for operational reasons. This can be the case, for instance, if a civilian mission of the EU in a theatre with significant security risks, such as its police training missions in Afghanistan, discourages the UK police personnel to sign up to that mission (O'Shea 2009).

When we consider that domestic responsibilities of representative governments make them the "transmission belt by which the preferences and social power of individuals and groups are translated into foreign policy" (Moravcsik 2008, p. 237), decision-makers should also consider the degree of public support and media attention for an organisation in general or a given operation in particular. For example, the lack of domestic support in

Europe for the Afghanistan campaign played an important role in the popular rejection of a long-term presence in the country, where both the EU and NATO launched training initiatives that were seen as tools of a wider exit strategy (Upadhyay and Pawelec 2016). In this sense, sectors of the UK's public opinion, such as its Afghan diaspora community, can influence British foreign policy when it comes to their community's country of origin (Gaskarth 2013, p. 30). Moreover, some operations can provide a discursive frame of reference for policymakers to avoid greater engagement with issues that are highly salient in the media (Bache and Jordan 2006, p. 22, Bickerton 2011).

The UK Parliament can also be involved in decisions about the commitment of national assets to multinational campaigns. It should, however, be noted that the UK Government "is under no legal obligation with respect to its conduct, including keeping Parliament informed" (Mills 2018, p. 9). In addition to this absence of legally established arrangements, there are also no conventions or long-standing political practices about the Parliament's involvement in the decision-making process regarding the use of armed force (Jenkins 2011, p. 18). In this context, a prime source of critique and scrutiny on British foreign policy are the parliamentary committees, where ministers and officials are questioned about their activities. Most prominent of these committees in terms of foreign, security and defence policies are the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) and the European Scrutiny Committee in the House of Commons and the European Select Committee in the House of Lords (Gaskarth 2013, p. 28).

In this understanding, in order for propositions related to domestic-level preferences to be vindicated, there should be evidence that the UK's decisions on overlapping EU and NATO operations are primarily shaped by concerns about prestige, interests or bureaucratic/organisational preferences of governmental stakeholders or public opinion (Figure 3).

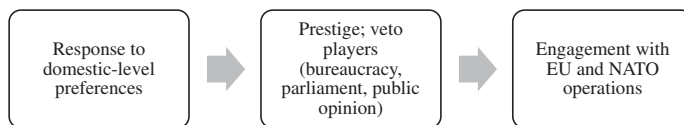


Figure 3. Influence pattern of domestic-level preferences.

3.3. Transatlantic relations

The third category of propositions can be summarised as "transatlantic relations". Given the scope and (often contested) meaning of transatlantic relations, two caveats are in order. First, security is only one issue area within the scope of transatlantic relations, which captures "the sum of relations and cooperation in a wide field of areas (economic, political, cultural, scientific and also military)" (Reichard 2006, p. 24). Second, not only the relationship between the EU and NATO but also the affairs between European and North American states is a facet of transatlantic relations (ibid, 23). With these two notes in mind, given the research task at hand, this article refers to transatlantic relations as CSDP's relationship with NATO, which is embedded in the larger context of bilateral relations between individual EU member states and the US (Pohl 2014, p. 31).

In this understanding, the UK can contemplate its preferences on overlapping EU and NATO operations by considering its situational relationship with the EU, NATO and US as well as its broader orientations about the crisis management roles of the EU and NATO. A first intervening factor that links transatlantic relations to the UK's preferences can be a logic of "alliance solidarity". Accordingly, the value the UK attaches to its alliance with the US and NATO might impact its decision to either support or not an EU and NATO operation. For instance, in Afghanistan, the UK preferred to join in NATO interventions in order to demonstrate its solidarity with the US (Pohl 2014). Indeed, Afghanistan is an important case for transatlantic relations, for which the country represented a "litmus test" (Korski 2009, p. 1). A primary reason is that in Afghanistan, Europe's desire to craft a strong, new strategic partnership with the US and the EU's willingness to uphold its credibility as a global security actor played an important role (Islam and Gross 2009). In such a case, there might be a clash between domestic pressures in European capitals against military contributions and the US pressure on the EU states to deploy more resources (Ginsberg and Penska 2012).

Secondly, the fault line that could be summarised as the EU's often contested strategic autonomy based on the "transatlantic bargain" where the EU is supposed to supplement NATO as a security provider (Ikenberry 2008, Toje 2008, Smith 2018) can also affect the UK's decisions on overlapping EU and NATO operations. Both the EU and the international community can see a military operation launched by the EU autonomously from NATO or the UN as an indicator of a security and defence capacity sufficient for the EU to conduct an "early, rapid, and where necessary, robust intervention" (Council 2003, 2016, Biscop 2019). A CSDP operation can serve different purposes for the EU, namely the protection of internal security, strengthening EU integration, external power projection or value promotion (Pohl 2014, Palm and Crum 2019). For instance, "the EU believe[d] that its small CSDP mission in Afghanistan raises its profile as an international security provider" (Merlingen 2012, p. 174) at a time when there was a sense in the EU that it was "punching below its weight and was not playing an important role in Afghanistan" (Larivé 2012, p. 91). In this sense, as a country that generally encouraged the EU's efforts as a means to strengthen the Atlantic alliance instead of demanding an EU strategic autonomy that could duplicate NATO (Cornish 2013), the UK's broader strategic attitudes regarding the EU, NATO and the US can affect the decision-making in London.

Hence, in order for propositions based on transatlantic relations to be vindicated, there should be evidence that, when engaging with overlapping EU and NATO operations, the UK primarily focuses on considerations about its situational relations with the EU, NATO and US or its broader orientations about the international crisis management roles of the EU and NATO (Figure 4).

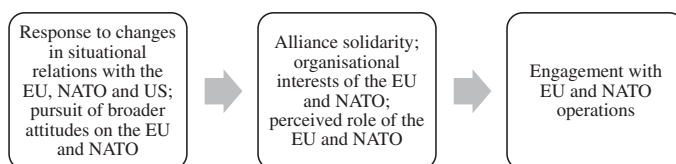


Figure 4. Influence pattern of transatlantic relations.

3.4. Identities

Finally, an operation's consistency with a specific component of the UK's identity as an international actor, namely, its attitudes about international security provision, might affect the nature of its engagement with an operation. Broadly speaking, states could induce identities, roles and obligations about a specific situation, rather than interests and individual rational expectations (March and Olsen 1998) when engaging with military operations. Accordingly, the UK can act in certain ways as "right things to do", judged against its self-conceptions in the world rather than material security threats. Similarly, it can also see ethical concerns as ends in themselves rather than issues that are subsumed within a parochial conception of national interest (Gilmore 2014). Whilst the UK's considerations about prestige are related to its external perceptions on power, status and role, from the vantage point of propositions based on the UK's identity as an international actor, the UK acts in line with non-material considerations not in order to influence others' perceptions, but to uphold these considerations as they are.

In this understanding, an intervening factor that can link the UK's identity with its preferences on overlapping EU and NATO operations can be related to the "appropriateness" of the means of intervention possessed by these operations. Historically, the UK's propensity to use military force as a means of intervention has manifested itself in a wide variety of ways and circumstances (Cornish 2013). However, with the UK's development of an integrated approach to international security during the Afghanistan campaign, based on the idea that military effort alone is unlikely to offer a durable solution to complex security challenges, military force has been accepted as a "last resort" to be used when civilian means of intervention are insufficient to deal with those challenges (Cabinet Office 2010, Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence 2011). In this understanding, the UK might prefer the EU's civilian-military instruments over NATO's predominantly military approaches in crisis management not due to pragmatic considerations but due to the "appropriateness" of the means of intervention (Heiduk 2011, Friesendorf 2013).

A second intervening factor can be the UK's willingness to pursue certain ethical considerations externally. For instance, British foreign policy during the Labour (1997–2010) and coalition (2010–2015) governments is described by national interest accompanied by an "ethical dimension" "that attempted to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable non-citizens", although the primacy of national interest over ethical considerations was a more prominent theme during the coalition government's "liberal conservative" foreign policy approach (Gilmore 2014, pp. 39-40). In this sense, the UK's engagement with overlapping EU and NATO operations can fit with certain values or ethical considerations that might be more in line with, for example, the EU's comprehensive approach. Indeed, the EU's civilian and military assets are not only parts of a crisis management toolbox but also "ways the union can make a difference to individuals and communities on the ground" (Martin and Kaldor 2009, Ginsberg and Penska 2012, p. 11). An example is the EU's "comprehensive foreign policy strategy, covering all dimensions of external action, from aid and trade to diplomacy and the military" (Biscop and Norheim-Martinsen 2012, p. 65). For instance, studies on EU and NATO initiatives in Afghanistan and the Gulf of Aden suggest that member states may recourse to the EU option as a distinct European approach that seeks to address the root causes of the issue in question via promoting the EU's principles

and values (Gross 2009, Riddervold 2014). Whilst several scholars question this rather self-proclaimed comprehensive the EU's approach, EU's response to all of the above security issues is different from the responses of NATO (e.g. Shepherd 2015, Faleg 2017, Juncos 2018, cf. Williams 2011). Even approaches sceptical about a unified European strategic culture agree that there is a "European consensus" based on good governance and effective multilateralism that can be seen as the foundation for an EU strategic culture (e.g. Rynning 2003, Norheim-Martinsen 2011).

Hence, in order for propositions related to the UK's identities to be vindicated, there should be evidence that when making decisions on engaging with an overlapping EU and/or NATO operation, the UK is primarily focused on its perceived appropriateness of the means of intervention or promotion of certain ethical considerations (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Influence pattern of identities.

4. UK engagement with the police missions in Afghanistan

4.1. *The context of Afghan reconstruction and the UK's engagement with it*

The UK's Afghanistan mission has been of a rather evolving nature since the initial deployment of British troops in the country in 2001. Indeed, the British approach moved from its original goal of countering international terrorism into the realms of counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, protection of human rights and state-building (HoC 2009, p. 84). Importantly, the UK was designated as the "lead nation" in counter-narcotics enforcement in Afghanistan at the April 2002 donors conference in Geneva. Among other lines of effort, rebuilding the Afghan National Police (ANP) structure and judicial reform were to be led respectively by Germany and Italy, while military reform and DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration) were to be overseen by the US and Japan respectively (UNODC 2006). In this context, the launch of the European Union police mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan, hereafter EUPOL) in 2007 and the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) in 2009 presented additional platforms for the UK to uphold its own agenda in the creation of post-conflict governance in Afghanistan. Before proceeding to the analysis of British strategies vis-à-vis the training missions of the EU and NATO in Afghanistan, this section outlines the institutional context of the UK's decision-making regarding these missions.

4.2. *Decision-making structure in London*

Especially in multifaceted operations such as the interventions in Afghanistan, multiple institutions of contributing governments can be involved in putting together national contributions, to which the UK decision-making is no exception. Broadly, integration of various UK capacities for responding to post-conflict environments centred on the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Department for International Development (DfID) and the Stabilisation Unit (SU) with a policing team since 2011 (Gordon 2010, p. 369).

FCO retains control on the management and delivery of the programmes about the civilian aspects of stabilisation such as the rule of law, justice and governance, areas that also formed part of DfID's portfolio (Gordon 2010, p. 373). In more particular terms, the peace support and stabilisation pillar of the UK's international policing assistance strategy "is predominantly the domain of the FCO, the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) and the Security Services" (Sinclair 2012, p. 58). Funding for the UK's contribution to EUPOL came from the UK's overall civilian programme expenditure (the Stabilisation Aid Fund, made up of FCO, MoD and DfID), with contributions from the jointly managed Conflict Pool (HoC 2008b, p. 66, HoC 2011a, p. 19). As far as NTM-A is concerned, MoD had the leading role in terms of recruitment and deployment of the UK personnel.³

Moreover, a cross-governmental Afghanistan Communications Team, the UK Embassy in Kabul (which had a counter-narcotics team) and the British Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Lashkargah, and other relevant UK Embassies and delegations attended the cross-governmental committees led by the Cabinet Office (CO) where issues regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan were regularly discussed (HoL 2010, Ev 5). Additionally, three cross-governmental teams in Whitehall were tasked with specific issues within the reconstruction of Afghanistan: the Afghanistan Drugs and Justice Unit, the Afghanistan Communications Team and the Foreign and Defence Policy Secretariat in the CO (HoL 2010). Finally, in 2007 the UK Government established a National Security, International Relations and Development Cabinet Committee (NSID), with a sub-committee titled "Afghanistan and Pakistan" and chaired by the Prime Minister and FCO (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy 2010). During the coalition government, NSID was replaced in 2010 by the National Security Council (NSC), which fortnightly discussed the FCO-led Afghanistan dossier (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee 2011a, p. 90, Ev 4).

4.3. Engagement with EUPOL Afghanistan before transition

EUPOL was launched in 2007 to "contribute to the establishment under Afghan ownership of sustainable and effective civilian policing arrangements, which will ensure appropriate interaction with the wider criminal justice system" (Council 2007). Rather than sending new personnel to EUPOL from the UK, London initially preferred to second its current officers in the country to secure key positions in the mission by double-hatting its police mentors in Helmand province (HoC 2007, p. 73). Initially, a key role the UK accorded to the EU mission was coordination for different policing efforts in the country through the International Police Coordination Board (IPCB), for which the UK promoted a secretary role for the EU (HoC 2008a, p. 28).

More importantly though, given its responsibility as the "lead nation" in counter-narcotics, during the agenda-setting and planning stages of the mission the UK tried and "secured a mandate that makes the linkages between police reform to the wider rule of law explicit, and that has countering narcotics as a crosscutting priority" (HoC 2007, p. 73). A reason behind this priority was the fact that law enforcement formed one of the five pillars of the UK's counter-narcotics strategy, the other four being interdiction,

eradication, alternative livelihoods and public information (interview with former UK official). Additionally, Jim Murphy, Minister for Europe at the FCO, stated that the cultivation and trade of narcotics products in Afghanistan was a key UK focus, but the issue is important also because they presented “an area with serious implications on our own streets, where 90% of heroin is sourced from Afghanistan” (House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee 2008a, p. 60). This suggests that the production and trade of drugs in Afghanistan was seen as a threat from which the “UK streets” must be protected, and counter-narcotics enforcement by the Afghan police as a measure for protection from this security threat.

Afghan National Police (ANP) had an important responsibility in the enforcement of the UK’s drug eradication strategies, not least because drug eradication “has been a leitmotif of police reform” in Afghanistan (Murray 2007, pp. 114–115). Moreover, for London, “developing an effective criminal justice system would be key [as] there was no point in developing good policing, if [Afghan] authorities could not effectively prosecute and punish criminals” (US Mission to the EU 2007). In this sense, by seeking to facilitate the development of ANP, EUPOL presented an opportunity for the UK to uphold counter-narcotics enforcement in the country. In particular, the UK justified its participation to EUPOL by referring to its security interests, namely eliminating the external threat emanating from the production and trade of narcotics in Afghanistan.

The UK’s engagement with EUPOL also resonated a broader British orientation about the role of the EU in crisis management, which is based on an approach of using the EU’s mainly civilian expertise that is not possessed by other crisis management actors such as NATO (Chappell et al. 2016, p. 177). According to London, EUPOL’s police training approach was “softer” compared to the “UK’s niche” on “hard edge” approach to counter-narcotics that adopts enforced interdiction (Interview with former UK official). In this sense, the UK drew a specific division of labour between EUPOL and the ongoing US programmes on police training.⁴ While the EU mission “concentrated at the strategic level [...] the US programme focussed on district by district training, and working with the Afghan Border Police to support them in gaining control over Afghanistan’s large and porous border” (HoC 2008a, p. 17). The UK’s emphasis on the EU’s civilian expertise is manifested by the view that the EU mission should “consolidate its lead on civilian policing, making best use of its niche expertise” because it suggests that civilian policing is an area that EUPOL could best deliver (HoC 2009, p. 29). Murphy described EUPOL as “an essential complement to the large US investment in police reform (\$2 billion), in that it provides civilian policing expertise to focus on the strategic and institutional issues that will determine the success of police reform in the long term” (HoC 2008a, p. 17). Similarly, a senior FCO official stated that the EU could utilise its already-established civilian project cells in the EU security sector reform missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (EUSEC DRC and EUPOL DRC) (HoC 2009). In implementing this civilian-led police training, EUPOL focused on two pillars of the ANP: Afghan Uniform Police (AUP) and the Anti-Crime Police. Emphasising this civilian approach, London argued that “EU partners [...] contribute less in military terms in Afghanistan to put more resources into the civilian effort” (US Mission to the EU 2007). At the same time, a top EU Director General stated that the EU was not always willing to accept the US approaches on police training as they were (US Mission to the EU 2008).

4.4. Deployment of NTM-A: differences from and overlap with the EU mission

NATO's involvement in the training of the Afghan police began with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). However, as a predominantly military force, ISAF did not have the appropriate expertise in civilian police training and its contribution has largely been based on training during its joint patrols with the ANP. Moreover, although the ISAF role in police training has been extended to other parts of the country through NATO's provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), the impact of their activities has mostly been local and did not affect the overall ANP reform (Murray 2007, p. 111). Thus, NATO's more direct involvement in police training in Afghanistan began with the announcement of NTM-A at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit in April 2009, two years after the deployment of EUPOL (NATO 2009a, 2009b).

NTM-A was also based on a "fundamentally new" NATO approach to the training of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), known as "embedded partnering", which "includes the Afghan National Police (ANP), ANA logistics units, and other combat support multipliers", and enabled ISAF to "develop metrics to track and evaluate the progress of partnering and its effectiveness with both the ANA and ANP" (McChrystal 2009, p. 4). In implementing this approach, NTM-A had a specific policing approach based on an "infantry-centric" police force with counter-insurgency capabilities (NATO 2010, p. 4). In particular, NTM-A focused on three groups for training: Afghan recruits, Afghans trainers (train-the-trainer) and Afghans who run systems and institutions (ibid, 12).

The intention at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit was that "EUPOL would concentrate on higher level civilian personnel, whereas NTM-A would concentrate on lower level and paramilitary training" (Simón 2013, p. 223). Nevertheless, NTM-A's activities generated an overlap between the two missions: The AUP, initially planned to be trained by the EU (HoL 2011, p. 15) became an object of the "recruit-train-assign" model adopted by NTM-A (NATO 2010, p. 4). Although NTM-A has not always been directly involved in the training of this element of the Afghan police, it was involved in the AUP's staffing process. This was evident in the fact that similar to EUPOL, NTM-A also contributed to ministerial development programmes such as training, leader development, anti-corruption, promotion of living quality and working conditions (NATO 2010, p. 16). More importantly, NTM-A has provided most of the supporting personnel for the Mol International Coordination Cell (MICC), an organisation that facilitated cohesion between donor programmes and Mol's requirements (NATO 2010, p. 22). Through this role, NTM-A "[has recommended] ways to enhance ANP generation, training, development, sustainment, and appropriate measuring" (NATO 2010, p. 22).

At the same time, there were marked differences between the two missions. Several practitioners pointed out that there was an incompatibility between the long-term civilian policing of EUPOL and NTM-A's short-term, military focused approach (HoL 2011). According to the official NTM-A document, the task of the local auxiliary police in Afghanistan (officially termed as the Afghan Local Police) "is defensive in nature, serving as a 'neighborhood watch' that will alert the AUP to respond to illegal activity, they are armed with AK-47s for self-defense and have no arrest or investigative authority" (NATO 2010, p. 24). This also implied a misfit between the value London attached to EUPOL Afghanistan (civilian and long-term) and the NTM-A mandate (militarised and short-term). Another key NTM-A goal was to increase the size of the police force by increasing the number of ANP

forces up to 135,000 by 2014 (by the time when NATO combat forces would also leave the country) (HoL 2010, p. 9), disproportionately higher than the personnel ceiling EUPOL's strategic-level advise could reach.

In spite of these similarities and differences between the EU and NATO missions, London placed "few but significant" police experts to NTM-A (interview with former NATO official). It also continued its contributions to EUPOL and maintained its emphasis on the coordination between the two missions to develop civilian policing skills "concurrently with the development of security skills". As stated by a senior FCO official, "EUPOL Afghanistan's strength is that its personnel have the strategic-level civilian policing expertise required to shape the overall direction of the ANP towards being a community-based police force". For London, the EUPOL's "core purpose" was the complementation of "large-scale training efforts led by NATO and the United States" and "bring[ing] EU resources into Afghanistan in support of a key UK foreign and security policy objective" (HoL 2010, p. 29).

4.5. Emergence of a withdrawal timeline

A new parameter for the UK's approach on police training emerged in June 2010, when Prime Minister David Cameron stated that British forces would not remain in Afghanistan in a combat role beyond 2015 (HoC 2011a, Ev 64). This followed US President Barack Obama's announcement of the incremental drawdown of the US forces out of the country (The White House 2009). Cameron's "firm deadline" for the withdrawal of British troops presented important changes in the UK's approach to police training (BBC 2010). In Cameron's words,

[...] as the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces increases, and the process of security transition is taken forward, the role of the international troops in Afghanistan will over time focus less on combat and more on training and mentoring the Afghan National Army and Police. (HoC 2011a, Ev 84)

Although this statement suggests a continuity with the previous emphasis on a civilian and long-term approach to police training, CO and FCO became more interested in initiatives that could yield "tangible results in the short term" that could prevent drug trafficking (Interview with former UK official). Importantly, the effects of police training on drug trafficking are less measurable and harder to quantify than promoting legal economic activity by building schools, clinics and roads (Rundell 2015, pp. 295–296). In this understanding, the UK's key goals focused increasingly on the creation of sustainable security conditions in a post-withdrawal Afghanistan (HoC 2011a, p. 38). This created tensions with the previous focus on civilian and long-term police training methods on the one hand, which was associated with the EU's expertise, and the emerging need for fast and visible recruitment of police officers on the other.

In line with the UK's aim to transfer security tasks to Afghan forces, in mid-2010, "merging ISAF and ANSF into one entity with a single purpose [of] protecting the population by defeating the insurgency", also known as "embedded partnering", became the priority for the Alliance (McChrystal 2009, p. 2, Farrell 2017, p. 376). According to the UK Government, NTM-A provided "greater training and equipment to help the police to defend themselves" (Cabinet Office 2011). More importantly, the UK justified its contribution to NTM-A by pointing out that the mission provides "strategic level advice on all

aspects of civilian policing” (HoC 2011a, Ev 6). Although “strategic level advice” on civilian policing used to be an element that the UK distinctively associated with EUPOL, London now linked it to NTM-A’s coordination role within MICC. Furthermore, IPCB, in which the UK has supported EUPOL’s leadership, was regarded by the US as non-binding due to insufficient European efforts in police assistance (Heiduk 2011). There was reportedly a cross-governmental view in Whitehall to avoid any public perception of discord with the US in Afghanistan, which was the main supporter and commander nation of NTM-A (US Embassy London 2009).

Over time, to ensure compatibility between the EU and NATO missions, senior NTM-A officials have been drawn to the high-level command of EUPOL (HoL 2011, p. 30). NTM-A has even “absorbed” EUPOL structures and that NTM-A looked to the EU particularly to undertake specific tasks such as curriculum and training for the police staff college (HoL 2011, p. 36). In 2011, no less than 87% of ANP staff operating in key terrain districts were partnered with ISAF units, of which NTM-A is a part (Chaudhuri and Farrell 2011, p. 279). London has “welcomed” NTM-A’s taking over of the lead responsibility in areas such as literacy training to ANP (Cabinet Office 2011).

As seen, the UK Government’s withdrawal decision affected the UK priorities in police training in Afghanistan, bringing the UK closer to the NATO than the EU mission. Furthermore, the increasing focus on fast and visible recruitment of Afghan police officers also compromised London’s attention on counter-narcotics enforcement. Indeed, in 2011, the UK closed down the public information section of the counter-narcotics team in its Embassy in Kabul, which was a key “soft edge” part of the UK’s counter-narcotics strategy (interview with former UK official). Given that counter-narcotics enforcement was an area that the UK Government sought to address through, among other things, the EU’s civilian expertise, the EU mission was also decreasing in the UK’s priority list in Afghanistan. This also suggests that the UK has made a compromise in its internationally recognised lead in counter-narcotics enforcement to fulfil transition tasks, implying that London was not concerned about the implications this would have to the UK’s prestige within the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The withdrawal decision and its implications present further challenges to the propositions based on domestic-level preferences in terms of veto players. First, a report from the Public Administration Select Committee (2010, p. 28) indicated that NSC, where the withdrawal decision was known to be discussed, has worked “as a clearing house [rather] than as an organ of critical assessment” where inputs of different Whitehall departments would have been factored into the withdrawal decision. According to the HoC Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) (2011a), the decision was not made collectively in the NSC but by a small group of decision-makers led by Cameron. William Hague, the Foreign Secretary of the time, confirmed that the withdrawal decision was not a “formal item” in the National Security Council (HoC 2011b, Ev 62).

Second, although the cross-departmental approach within Whitehall might have posed particular decision-making challenges to the UK, as stated above, FCO’s and CO’s stances came increasingly closer to the provision of policing through NATO, which was an option not unfamiliar for the MoD as the lead department in the UK’s contributions to NTM-A.

Third, London’s support for the expansion of NTM-A’s role in police training at the expense of EUPOL also contrasts other empirical expectations of propositions based on domestic-level preferences, according to which parliamentary scrutiny and public

opinion would have determined the UK Government's engagement with the EU and NATO missions. An FAC report indicated that the slow pace of EUPOL's reform was mitigated by trainers and advisers from the US military, which runs the risk of creating para-military style police as opposed to the civilian force which was originally envisaged and which will be needed in the future' (HoC Foreign Affairs Committee 2009, p. 37). The HoL also raised concerns about "a serious push to arm and equip informal policing forces in Afghanistan" (HoL 2010, p. 10). A report from its EU Committee (House of Lords European Union Committee 2011, p. 20) emphasised that NTM-A's predominantly militarised police training approach raised questions as to how such difference can create a division of labour in the field, which could in turn challenge the UK's fight against drug trade in Afghanistan.

In addition to this interest from the Parliament, incidents that could be related to the UK's engagement with police training in Afghanistan were also covered by the media at the time. For instance, the shooting of five British military personnel by an Afghan police officer in November 2009 raised questions over the military-led training regime (BBC 2009). Yet, rather than changing the strategy after this scrutiny at the domestic level, the UK has continued to place police experts into the military-led police training provided by NTM-A to "try and bridge the gap between NATO/US military approach and the police expertise" (interview with former NATO official).

Although the UK appeared to be shifting some of EUPOL's key responsibilities to NTM-A, it did not refrain from seconding police staff to the EU mission during the incremental withdrawal process. A former NATO official described this strategy as "straddling" between the EU and NATO missions, where the UK maintained an active engagement with both missions (interview with former NATO official). One of the UK's concerns at the time was that "a failure, or perceived failure of EUPOL [...] could spell trouble for the whole future of civilian European Security and Defense Policy operations" (US Mission to the EU 2009a). This concern was evident in the UK's continued linkage of some civilian aspects of its counter-narcotics strategy with EUPOL, which was more closely related to the UK's counter-narcotics enforcement efforts than NTM-A (interview with NATO official): According to the UK Government, "EUPOL [brought] expertise that others do not and that it is playing an essential role in the professionalisation of the ANP" (Cabinet Office 2011). This suggests that civilian instruments of the EU mission were endorsed not because they were seen as an appropriate means of intervention or due to ethical considerations, as the propositions based on identities would expect. Instead, in line with the empirical expectations of the propositions based on security interests, the UK has engaged with EUPOL during the transition period by considering the "functionality" of the mission in terms of addressing the external security threat emanating from the production and trade of narcotics in Afghanistan.

In addition, this emphasis on civilian means of the EU mission also lends support to propositions based on transatlantic relations for two reasons. First, as stated, the UK's enduring support to EUPOL was also affected by a pragmatic approach based on instrumentalising the EU's expertise in crisis management that is not possessed by other organisations such as NATO, which has been a long-standing strategic preference for the UK about the crisis management roles of the EU and NATO (Chappell et al. 2016, p. 177). Second, the UK's endorsement of the NTM-A's militarised approach to fulfil transition tasks is informed to a certain extent by the UK's relations with its European and US partners. As a former UK official stated, in the context of counter-narcotics enforcement,

the UK was “extremely close to Americans [and that] I [*sic*] was meeting with my US counterparts almost every day”, whereas the UK officials had “very little engagement with Europeans” (Interview with former UK official). Referring to different objectives and remits of the EU and NATO missions, the UK Government has indicated that “NATO and the US [understood] this distinction and [...] they [were] keen that EUPOL delivers on its existing objectives with the personnel already at its disposal” (Cabinet Office 2011). Whilst Washington’s focus was “on infrastructure projects (roads and power), economic development, education, and alternative (agricultural) development/counter-narcotics programs” the European assistance prioritised “governance, justice/rule of law, and health” (Flanagan et al. 2011, p. 197). Moreover, London’s calls for other EU member states to invest more on civilian and less in military capabilities in Afghanistan did not result in a speeding up of civilian contributions to EUPOL. These points present further evidence to the empirical expectations of transatlantic relations, as the UK’s engagement with the EU and NATO missions was informed by both its long-term strategic attitudes about the EU and NATO and its closer relationship with NATO and the US than its EU partners.

However, a closer examination suggests a more nuanced picture for transatlantic relations. In fact, the UK Government’s undermining of the EU mission presents inconsistencies with the broader orientations about the crisis management roles of the EU and NATO as laid out in the UK’s strategic documents at the time. According to the 2008 National Security Strategy (NSS), the UK was to work for “more integrated EU capabilities across politics, development, and security – with a particular focus on its potential to make a positive contribution to security sector reform” and “to avoid NATO depending so heavily on the military capabilities” (Cabinet Office 2008, p. 49). As stated above, in Afghanistan, the UK also encouraged the EU to use its civilian expertise gained from the EU’s interventions in DRC. Moreover, the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) indicated that the UK seeks to “ensure that both [EU and NATO] can call on [...] civilian resources; sharing expertise and developing complementary [...] skills” (Cabinet Office 2010, p. 62). Yet, the UK’s aforementioned support to NTM-A at the expense of EUPOL does not fit these strategic orientations about the crisis management roles of the EU and NATO. As stated, the UK has not only turned its back on the EU’s civilian expertise but also supported a military-led police reform under NATO, thereby prioritising one mission over the other rather than encouraging complementarity between the missions. This discussion suggests that there may be discrepancies between different aspects of transatlantic relations: The UK’s concerns about situational relations with EU, NATO and US partners on the operational ground can present divergences from its strategic attitudes within the broader transatlantic security landscape.

5. Conclusion

To what extent does the UK’s engagement with the EU and NATO training missions in Afghanistan confirm or contradict the propositions within the analytical framework? Two propositions have been decisive for the UK’s engagement with the said missions, albeit at different moments. Before the emergence of a timeline for the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan, the UK sought to instrumentalise EUPOL for its counter-narcotics agenda. Because the EU mission was seen as a means to address the production

and trade of narcotics in Afghanistan, which was perceived as a security threat to the UK, the UK's engagement with EUPOL especially during the pre-transition period fits with empirical expectations of propositions based on security interests.

With the emergence of a "firm deadline" for the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan, however, London increasingly viewed the EU mission primarily in terms of its relationship with NATO and the US within the broad context of the transition process. In addition to supporting NTM-A's encroachment into the responsibilities of EUPOL, the UK's focus on counter-narcotics enforcement, for which EUPOL's expertise was seen as a complementary instrument, has also decreased after criticisms from Washington that the EU mission was ineffective. Despite parallel warnings from Brussels that a failure of EUPOL would spell trouble for the EU's external image, the UK has increasingly turned to NTM-A at the expense of the EU mission. Although this lends support to transatlantic relations, as the UK's closer relationship with NATO and the US played an important role in this process, a closer examination reveals a more nuanced picture. That is, the UK's prioritisation of NTM-A's military-led police reform approach also presents inconsistencies with the UK's strategic orientation to work for more integrated civilian capabilities in the EU, a less military-dependent NATO and complementarity between the two organisations in terms of crisis management. Therefore, "the possible" may not match "the desirable" in transatlantic relations: The UK's concerns about contingent relations with the EU, NATO and US partners can present divergences from its broader strategic orientations within the transatlantic security landscape.

It is difficult to find substantial evidence for domestic-level preferences. First, the role of veto players was limited: The withdrawal decision, which provided a new parameter to the UK's contribution to police training in Afghanistan, was taken by the Prime Minister without extensive consultation with Whitehall departments in the NSC, which worked more "as a clearing house" without the kind of inputs from different Whitehall departments to facilitate a critical assessment of the government's policies. Moreover, the cross-Whitehall workstream related to the UK's international policing did not create significant intragovernmental tensions: FCO and CO converged around the idea of attaining "tangible results" via British police training in Afghanistan, which brought these key agencies closer to the option of prioritising the NATO mission in terms of policing assistance, an option that is familiar with, and preferable for, the MoD. Neither the criticism from the UK Parliament nor the domestic media coverage about the arming of the Afghan police brought about meaningful changes in the UK's prioritisation of the military-led police training provided by the NATO mission. Third, it is also difficult to suggest that the British preferences about the EU and NATO missions were informed by a concern about prestige. One area to look at in order to assess the possible role of prestige concerns is the UK's internationally recognised lead in counter-narcotics enforcement within the reconstruction of Afghanistan. In fact, especially after the Prime Minister's withdrawal announcement, the UK became more focused on transition tasks than counter-narcotics enforcement in Afghanistan, as seen, among other things, in the closing down of the counter-narcotics team in the British Embassy in Kabul in 2011.

The propositions based on the UK's identity also cannot explain the UK's engagement with the EU and NATO training missions in Afghanistan. According to these propositions, the UK would have engaged with these missions by considering the appropriateness of

the means of intervention possessed by these missions. As stated above, it was a predominantly pragmatic approach based on the usefulness, rather than the appropriateness, of the EU's non-military instruments that informed the UK's emphasis on the civilian expertise of the EU mission.

This analysis also shows that the co-existence of multiple factors may or may not result in immediate tensions between different propositions. For instance, London's engagement with the EU mission before the emergence of the withdrawal timeline suggests that the UK's security interests can be in line with its broader attitudes about the crisis management roles of the EU and NATO. During this period, the UK has sought to instrumentalise the EU's civilian expertise both to reinforce its counter-narcotics agenda and to complement NATO's military efforts, which fits both with a motivation to eliminate an external security threat and strategic orientations. On the other hand, the UK Government's relative autonomy from parliamentary scrutiny, which meant a less significant role for domestic-level preferences, may have paved the way for it to focus more on external considerations such as relations with the US and NATO. Indeed, despite the Parliament's criticism on NATO's military-led police training approach, the UK kept contributing to this mission to bridge the gap between the US/NATO training approaches and police requirements in Afghanistan. Moreover, as seen in the UK's perception of production and trade of narcotics in Afghanistan, framing an issue as a material threat can undermine a normative emphasis on the "appropriateness" of the means of intervention, suggesting a difficulty in pursuing security interests and ethical considerations at the same time.

However, this article also has limitations. Although an extensive engagement with official sources has facilitated a closer examination of the UK's strategies in engaging with EU and NATO missions in Afghanistan, this compromised a comparative analysis due to space considerations. Hence, further, dense case studies of member state decision-making about choosing between overlapping EU and NATO operations could be useful to elucidate scope conditions of the propositions outlined in this article, which are more analytical explanations than stand-alone theories. For example, in addition to the UK, which is a major member of both organisations, focusing on smaller states in both organisations as well as states with single membership could be avenues for future research. Additional case studies might also shed light on the cross-case validity of the factors that could shape national decision-making processes.

Notes

1. The phrase "member state engagement" covers member states' preferences such as operational support (e.g. contributing assets), diplomatic support or tolerance (e.g. supporting the launch of an operation without contributing assets), and reluctance to or rejection of these operations during different and sometimes parallel operational phases (e.g. planning, force generation and launch).
2. The inquiries of these committees are attended by Members of Parliament, Lords, officials in the UK government, EU and NATO, and independent analysts, depending on the topic at hand.
3. Email communication with FCO's Central Freedom of Information Unit.
4. Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) and Focused District Development (FDD).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Richard Whitman, Benjamin Martill and Filiz Doğan, two anonymous referees as well as the participants of the BISA European Security Working Group workshop in January 2020 for their helpful suggestions on drafts of this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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