The Power Politics of European Integration:  
The EU as a Great Power Manager

David M. McCourt  
*University of Sheffield, UK*

Andrew Glencross  
*University of Aberdeen, UK*

WORK IN PROGRESS PLEASE DO NOT CITE

Abstract

How can we explain the European Union’s development of an expansive foreign, military, and security policy architecture in recent years? In this paper, we revive the concept of “Great Power Management” from the work of Hedley Bull, and use it to argue that the EU’s international actor-ness and emergence since the Second World War follows an enduring logic of great power politics. Moving beyond power politics viewed as a struggle for domination and a preoccupation with balancing, we show that the EU now engages in a set of international management practices that is constitutive of the category *great power* in world politics. Re-introducing this concept into the literature on the EU in the world, therefore, we show that GPM opens up numerous vistas for productive research into the theory and practice of EU integration.

Key Words:

EU; foreign and security policy; Great Power Management; Realism; English School

Introduction
Having begun as an economic community with the political rationale of pacifying Western Europe, the European Union (EU) today boasts significant competencies in the areas of foreign, security, and military policy. It has a Council President and a High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, a Security Strategy, a diplomatic machinery in the External Action Service, and a Defence Agency. More than mere rhetoric, the EU has put these capabilities to work through numerous militarized missions. These developments are not in dispute, but the causal mechanism behind them and what they mean for the EU are hotly contested. What explains the EU’s puzzling move into the security arena? And what does it imply for the Union as a potential major player in an evolving global order?

Typically, competing accounts make some reference to great power politics. Some readily dismiss power politics and the claim that the EU is a great power in the making (Bull 1982), viewing the EU as a “civilian power” (Duchêne 1973) that suffers from a “capability-expectations gap.” (Hill, 1994) More recent grounds for dismissing power politics view the EU as merely a “normative” (Manners, 2002) or “small” (Toje, 2011) power. Other interpretations consider power politics to define the limits of integration only. Realists explain why integration stalls without an external threat (Rosato, 2011) and what hinders efforts to integrate (Rynning, 2011; Hyde-Price, 2006). At the same time, the debate over the EU’s grand strategy, redolent of great power ambitions, highlights a compatibility problem between the its liberal values and a realist global order (Smith, 2011). Whether implicitly or explicitly, therefore, power politics is a key reference point in debate over EU foreign policy.

Yet this paper argues that the nature of great power politics has been misunderstood and misapplied in the debate. This claim is based on the novel
argument the paper seeks to make: that significant explanatory light is shed on both the development of EU foreign policy and the nature of its actorness by reference to the concept of *great power management* (GPM) drawn from the work of Hedley Bull (1977). In short, the paper argues that the EU is developing a foreign and security policy architecture to engage in the management of international affairs. This, moreover, reflects both the desire of its principal member states to participate in this enterprise and the consent of other great powers desirous that the EU engage in GPM.

In making this argument, we follow the insights of the ‘practice turn’ in IR to rethink power politics as a practice. From this perspective, ‘great power’ is not what a state *is*, but something a state *does*; great powers are those actors that engage in the management of international affairs. Using the framework of Bull, this process is defined as managing relations with other great powers, controlling crises and limiting war, and maintaining spheres of influence and regional balances of power, or engaging in great power concerts. Crucially, this expands great power politics beyond balancing alone, a vision that has limited the purchase of realist explanations of the EU’s international relations. We do not claim that this power political logic explains everything about the EU’s international relations, but that the neglect of power politics has masked its important influence on European foreign policy.

We first set up the puzzle of the EU’s development of military and security capabilities, and defend a power political reading. We then recover the notion of great power management and lay out its methodological requisites. The following part illustrates the power of this reading, discussing the EU’s interactions with important others and its engagement in GPM-activities. We conclude with implications for the theory and practice of European integration.
1. Power Politics and European Foreign Policy

During the Cold War, realists discounted the possibility of European integration in the field of security. “High politics” was not thought amenable to a functional logic of pooled sovereignty (Hoffmann 1966). This contrasted with economic integration, made possible by a US security guarantee that allowed Western European countries to avoid calculations based on relative gains (Waltz 1979). With the demise of the USSR came the realization of concrete cooperation in security policy, notably the 1992 Maastricht Treaty that provided the legal and political architecture for a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This opened up a now broad theoretical debate seeking to explain this development and assess what kind of actor the EU is.

Neo-realist assumptions about power politics offer multiple but contradictory arguments. For some, the uniting of sovereign states remains an exceptional process based on a response to a clear threat (Rosato 2011). Other explanations portray CFSP as a form of “soft” balancing against a global hegemon (Pape 2005; Posen 2006) or as a means of controlling the latent hegemonic potential of a re-united Germany (Hyde Price 2006). However, foreign policy coordination in the EU has not produced anything like the unitary capability of a sovereign state. As a result, some neo-realists argue that CFSP and its offshoot of military and civilian missions (known as the Common Security and Defence Policy, or CSDP) is less a balancing manoeuvre than an exercise in trying to influence the US hegemon, in order to keep it involved in European security issues (Brooks and Wohlfarth 2005).

As a result of this plurality, dissatisfaction abounds with realist accounts. Constructivists, for their part, take seriously the alternative proposition that—as a non-state entity—the EU represents a different kind of power in international politics.
From this perspective, the EU’s actorness—i.e. its reliance on soft power—is an external projection of a union of states designed to overcome power balancing and coercive diplomacy within Europe. Being ‘different to pre-existing political forms’ the EU is said to be ‘pre-dispose[d] to act in a normative way’ (Manners 2002: 242). Consequently, the EU’s CFSP is based on articulating “normative power”, designed to civilize the external environment just as economic integration civilized European inter-state relations (ibid.).

As much as this normative commitment helps explain the EU’s insistence on multilateralism, intervening for human security, or on addressing climate change, this interpretation of CFSP has been subject to much criticism. As well as pointing out the variety of material interests that intrude into CFSP (Aggestam 2008), critics of constructivism see no explanation for CFSP’s abstruse institutionalization. The latter is epitomized by the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, which created an External Action Service under the authority of a dual-hatted High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy acting as both vice-president of the Commission and as the chair of the Council of Ministers in its foreign policy configuration. In this context, institutionalist theory points out that CFSP is a reflection of a logic of institutionalization that has changed the identities and interests of national foreign policy actors via cooperation, consultation, and consensus-building (Smith 2003). At the same time, a functionalist perspective suggests this emphasis on institution-building comes from the design of the integration project itself. In this sense, CFSP is less about effective policy-making and international actorness than a way to smooth over inter-institutional conflict between foreign policy actors in the EU and create a foreign policy identity that can legitimize the project to its citizens (Bickerton 2011).
Ostensibly, theoretical accounts of CFSP that look beyond neo-realism discard power politics. Yet beneath the surface, the notion of great power and power politics are essential elements within normative power or functional approaches: ‘Normative Power Europe’ was developed as a way to escape the debate over whether CFSP represents a civilian or military power (Manners 2002); by extension, the study of normative convergence amongst the strategic cultures of leading EU member states involves a study of how discourse in Britain, France, Germany, and Poland rejects power projection for its own sake (Meyer 2007); finally, the debate over CFSP’s functional purpose involves the prior assumption that member states reject the protection of interests through force (Bickerton 2011). It therefore seems impossible to understand CFSP without explicit or implicit reference to great power politics.

Instead of making sense of power politics via classical realism, however, as Rynning has recently suggested, we argue for a reconceptualisation of great power politics in terms of ‘great power management.’

2. Recovering Great Power Management

GPM is a neglected aspect of both Waltz’s Theory of International Politics (1979) and Bull’s The Anarchical Society (1977). It is most explicit in the former, where the “management of international affairs” is afforded an entire chapter (1979: 194-210). Yet GPM has never formed the basis of a Waltz-inspired account of world politics. By contrast, “balancing” was for a long time ubiquitous and remains popular (Nexon 2009). Bull, meanwhile, does not explicitly invoke GPM, but stresses how managing international affairs is a foundational characteristic of the “great powers”—one of the five institutions of international society he identifies, alongside war, diplomacy, international law and the balance of power (1977: 199-220). Here too,
GPM is by far the least invoked part of his much-utilized framework (Astrov 2011: 2).

The reason, we contend, is GPM’s definitional ambiguity and a consequent lack of clarity over how to use it. Waltz does not even attempt operationalization. Bull accords GPM more specificity: for him it involves managing relations amongst great powers and ‘exploit[ing] their preponderance in relation to the rest of international society’ (Bull 1977: 206) by acting unilaterally or jointly. Bull’s conceptualization will form the basis of our approach below, but two things are important to remark upon here. First, the exact behaviours that constitute GPM are not explicitly stated. Second, the relationship between GPM and balancing is left opaque. What is clear is that for both, power politics is 1) a sufficiently important aspect of state action to require extended elaboration; 2) either not worth operationalizing or not able to be operationalized; and 3) not to be equated with the balance of power. Recovering GPM thus requires facing up to a three-fold challenge: what is GPM? Can it be operationalized, and, if so, how? And how is great power management distinct from balancing behavior?

We proceed by re-examining Bull’s account of GPM through the lens of the ‘practice turn’ in IR, an approach which overcomes the lack of methodological sophistication that has limited the English School in its attempt to offer an alternative to US-dominated structural IR theory. The first step in elaborating a practice-based conceptualization of GPM, however, is to re-evaluate the more basic concepts of “great power” and “power politics.”

Great power as role

Many IR scholars rely almost unconsciously on Waltz’s definition of a great power: if, and for neorealists like Waltz only if, a state is in the first rank in a range of
sectors—military, economic power, population, and political competence (1979: PAGES)—does it count as a great power, and hence a “pole” in a given system. This definition has met with scepticism: Notably, the insistence on equating great power with certain capacities of a sovereign state has been criticized by English School theorists. Buzan and Wæver (2003: 33) point out that a system-level pole could just as well be ‘a group of independent political communities,’ like the EU (ibid., 59). What is important here, however, is that Waltz’s definition makes a problematic conceptual move from the outset: it conflates the concept of ‘status’ or ‘rank’ with that of ‘role.’

This is crucial because the central difference between status and role is that roles are defined as sets of expectations attached to particular social positions, whereas status refers to the hierarchical ordering of those social positions (Joas 1993). Statuses thus have no expectations attached to them. As a result, Waltz and other structural realists are—by necessity—guilty of imputing behavioural expectations to great powers, since states are expected to do in world politics must come from somewhere, in this case Waltz’s imagination. For him, drawing on classical realist thought, the characteristic behavior of states in international politics is to balance power.

Yet critics question this foundational claim. As Alexander Wendt has shown, the content of the expectations attached to states come from international political culture—norms, modes of legitimacy, etc.—and cannot be simply assumed. Pace Waltz, therefore, states need not always play the role of ‘enemy’ to every other state; so-called ‘cultures of anarchy’ could come into existence in which states are ‘rivals’ or even ‘friends’ (Wendt 1999) as the current transatlantic ‘security community’ demonstrates (Barnett and Adler 1998). In the second place, as Stuart Kaufman, Richard Little and William Wohlfforth have found in their exhaustive study of world
history, balancing is a historically rare event (Kaufman et. al. 2007). Balancing is one of the typical behaviours of the most significant powers in an international system at any given time, but it is not the only one (Bull 1977).

As such, a first necessary step in rethinking great power politics and its effects on European external policy, is to understand great power in explicitly role-based terms. Unlike statuses, from which no behavioural expectations necessarily follow, roles are defined as sets of expectations about the likely behaviour of a given actor in a particular social context. They do not determine behaviour: in everyday life it is possible, for example, for a professor to let a student take class. But this is against the expectations that make up the role of professor, and, crucially, that of student. Similarly, we argue that there is a set of expectations attached to the role great power that provide a fruitful yardstick with which to gauge the activities of great powers as a set of management practices. According to both Waltz and Bull, great powers not only balance rising powers, in a more general sense they also act to manage international affairs. They do so, Bull argued, because they have a vital interest in the perpetuation of the state system as ultimately sovereignty provides them with security. Balancing power is thus one of the ways in which great powers act to manage the system, but it is not the only one.

Role-based explanations of social action are, however, notoriously problematic—beset by similar difficulties to norm-based explanations. Put simply, it is difficult to fully explain observed behaviour by reference to a set of expectations that make up a social role, many of which are often tacit rather than explicit. How do we know, for example, that a professor showed asked a particular question in an exam for pedagogical reasons, or to make his or her life easier? More than one social action can often follow from the same norm, or social role. The typical recourse is to the
notion of “socialization” and the “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen 1998) This, however, does not solve the problem, since it merely describes in a different way what is going on inside the socialized individual—appropriateness calculations rather than cost-benefit analyses. What is required, instead, is nothing less than a different way of understanding social action. This has been provided recently to IR by the concept of “practice.” (Pouliot 2008; Adler and Pouliot 2011) Following this development, we argue that the expectations constitutive of the great power role are derived from the practice that constitutes the great power role: great power politics.

**Great power politics as practice**

It is our contention that significant explanatory light can be shed on the EU’s movement into the foreign, security and defence sphere by viewing it through the lens of great power politics understood as a distinct social practice with a set of conventions, norms, and expectations and standards of conduct of its own. In short, the EU is developing the capacity to do what great powers do, which is manage international affairs.

The notion of practice is meant to grasp the context-and time-dependent nature of social action, and its intensely practical nature: “practices are competent performances...meaningful patterns of action which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse on the material world.” (Adler and Pouliot 2011: 6). For reasons of space, it is not possible to discuss the definitional and explanatory elements of practices comprehensively. What matters here is that a practice perspective overturns foundational epistemological and ontological assumptions of mainstream political science. In particular, this includes the correspondence theory of truth, so that
the invocation of “practices” is not designed to allow for a “matching” exercise against behavior “in the world” (Kratochwil 2011). Instead, empirical investigation into the practices of international politics is concerned with what Pouliot terms “the logic of practicality” (2008).

As Pouliot stresses, three steps are necessary when explaining action from a practice-based perspective: first, the scholar must grasp the logic that characterizes the practice (2008: 65-78). The second task is to objectify these inter-subjective understandings. This requires in turn reliance on social scientific concepts, where care is taken not to reify them but to highlight their ideal-typical nature. Finally, the practice must be historicized, in order to further objectify the practice and to trace concatenations of objective conditions and practical logics that can support causal claims about the impact of GPM. In the following illustration, we explore the social practice of great power politics from the viewpoint of the European Union. In this case, the first step becomes identifying what unstated assumptions and conventions order the EU’s international interactions. These equate with the expectations constitutive of the EU’s role, which come from both the EU itself and its main interlocutors. For the second step of objectifying these inter-subjective understandings we draw on Bull’s account of great power management as an ideal-type. The third step, that of tracing the practical logic of great power management empirically is reserved for section 3.

Great Power Management

Hedley Bull’s account of international society contains a discussion of the category of ‘great power’ understood in essence as a social role—a set of expectations attached to states of a certain status, the ‘great responsibles’. Bull also seems to have
grasped that a conceptual framework was required to objectify those expectations, in order to avoid relying on subjective ideas alone. He thus developed an admirably clear ideal-typical account of the role of great powers, even if again his approach is not couched in these terms. For Bull (1977), the preservation of order in the international system is the most important expectation constituting the role great power, and he outlines six core expectations that, together, characterize how great powers carry out this function: through (i) the preservation of the general balance; (ii) avoidance and control of crises; (iii) limitation of war; (iv) the unilateral exercise of local preponderance; (v) spheres of influence, interest or responsibility; and (vi) a great power concert or condominium.

Thus ‘the first and cardinal contribution of the great powers to international order,’ Bull stresses, ‘is to manage their relations with one another.’ (1977: 201-2) They do this principally by preserving the general balance of power, ‘and so provid[ing] the conditions under which the system of states can endure.’ (ibid., 201) Specifying a priori what actions might be required was not Bull’s concern, as these shift depending on historical context. He notes, however, that at the time of writing the management of mutual nuclear deterrence was a principal means by which the US and Soviet Union fulfilled this function. Importantly, although Bull makes sustaining the general balance of power the first aspect of the balance of power, his identification of other key expectations makes clear the way in which balancing power is not enough to ensure stability and hence the guaranteed continuation of the society of states.

Second, great powers seek to avoid and control the effects of crises with one another (ibid., 202-6). Maintaining a rough balance of power then is nothing without constant vigilance against the outbreak of systemic war. This is not to say that crises
are always avoided, or to gainsay the fact crises are sometimes manufactured by states for strategic purposes (ibid., 202). The control of crises is as important for Bull as their avoidance. Third, one means of achieving this is to take appropriate measures to avoid war or, again, limit it where it does occur (ibid., 206-7). Once again, Bull lays down no fixed markers for what counts as the avoidance and control of crises and limitations on war. Both unilateral action, including the potential use of limited war, and cooperation “to evolve operational rules or tacit understandings to co-operate in the preservation of these limitations,” (ibid., 207) count.

Fourth, states use their local preponderance of power to maintain order in their locality (ibid., 207-12). This relates closely to the fifth aspect of Bull’s account of the role of the great powers: great powers act to establish local spheres of interest in which they can maintain such control (ibid., 212-8). Bull makes the further distinction between the use of preponderance through ‘dominance,’ ‘primacy’ and ‘hegemony’. Dominance and primacy exist at opposite ends of a spectrum of legitimacy: dominance is the ‘habitual use of force by a great power against the lesser states comprising its hinterland’ and ‘habitual disregard of the universal norms of interstate behavior.’ (ibid., 207); primacy is achieved ‘without any resort to force or the threat of force, and with no more than the ordinary degree of disregard for norms of sovereignty, equality and independence.’ (ibid., 208) Hegemony exists between these two poles.

The sixth and final mode of managing international affairs employed by the great powers is through the creation of a great power concert. This describes either moments or ongoing examples of when states ‘contribute to international order by agreeing, not upon a division of the world into spheres of influence, interest or
responsibility, but to join forces in promoting common policies throughout the system as a whole’ (ibid. 218).

Our contention, then, is that Bull’s conceptual scheme provides a relatively parsimonious ideal-typical account of the expectations attached to the role of great power in world politics, one that can usefully be applied to the EU and its foreign policy. Understanding this scheme of GPM as an ideal-type—one *which includes the balance-of-power but subsumes it under a more historical and socially rich conceptualization of the great power role*—thus broadens the focus on great power behaviour beyond the strictures of structural realism. The expectations are therefore general enough to allow comparison of different states and across historical periods, but narrow enough to make such comparisons meaningful. As an ideal-type, they are not meant to be confused with reality, but to amplify one vision of world politics, to be contrasted—favourably or unfavourably—with observed behaviour.

The following section uses this scheme to analyze EU foreign and security policy. It has a twin aim: to reconstruct as far as possible the logic of practice of the EU’s external relations, which we relate to great power politics; and then to objectify that logic through the application of Bull’s ideal-type of GPM. For reasons of space, we can only suggest the usefulness of this approach for explaining specific actions on the part of EU policy-makers. In simple terms, on the one hand we are looking for evidence that EU foreign policy-makers see themselves, and are seen by others, as engaged in the things that great powers do; on the other, we are looking for evidence that the EU is indeed engaged in actions that fall into the conceptual categories Bull outlines.

3. EU foreign policy: a Great Power Management approach
The logic of practice of EU foreign policy

The practical logic of EU foreign policy can be characterized as a logic of great power politics. Assertions of the necessity for the Union to play a large role on the international stage are commonplace. As High Representative for CFSP Catherine Ashton noted in a speech in May 2012: ‘we will continue to do what the framers of the Lisbon Treaty—and long before them, Robert Schuman—intended; for Europe to play an active role in solving global problems.’\(^1\) The reason typically given is that since the world is changing, it is imperative Europe’s voice be heard, and this can only be done together. As Council President Herman Van Rompuy stated in late 2010, after surveying the contemporary ‘globalised’ world, ‘THIS is the global stage on which Europe has to act. In this new world, which may offer us many surprises, we have to get and occupy our place.’\(^2\) As Ashton stressed, ‘it is no longer ‘our’ world …we need the EU not just for us in Europe, but also as the vehicle to act in a fast-changing world and to influence its direction with our ideas.’\(^3\)

Of course, such views represent these actors’ institutional interests—Van Rompuy’s and Ashton’s jobs depend on an active global presence. It also represents a leap of faith given the EU’s current capabilities. However, evidence suggests other global powers, the US, China, and Russia, interact with the EU as a fellow great power manager.

The EU as a great power manager

Having elaborated, if briefly, on the great power political logic of practice of EU foreign policy, we now objectify these inter-subjective meanings using the GPM framework. The driving question is: does the EU ‘do’ GPM?

1. Bilateral relations and the general balance. The EU first negotiated a formal bilateral mechanism of cooperation with Russia in 1994, which came into force in 1997. This Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) committed member states to pursue common economic and political objectives with Russia through the CFSP (Timmermann 1996). Between 1999 and 2004, the EU pursued a unilateral “Common Strategy for Russia” under the legal framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy made possible by the Amsterdam Treaty (1997). This was a strategy supposed to commit EU member states to coordinate their foreign policies towards Russia with the aim of consolidating democracy, market reforms and the rule of law in the latter (Forsberg 2004). Since 2005 both sides have been seeking a replacement for the 1997 PCA, with no final agreement as yet although formal political dialogue is frequent: there are biannual summits, Russian Government-European Commission meetings, a Permanent Partnership Council involving ministerial-level representation, and an inter-parliamentary Cooperation Committee.

Russia has thus taken a keen interest in developments in European integration since the end of the Cold War, pursuing an active engagement with a view to managing the international order. In the aftermath of the NATO intervention in Kosovo, Russia actively courted security cooperation through the nascent ESDP, which was rightly interpreted as benign towards its interests (ibid.). Initially, Russia hoped that this institutional development would reduce NATO’s influence on the continent although this perception soon waned in light of EU countries’ unwillingness
to break with America (Rontoyanni 2002). This fitted with the Putin administration’s
desire to develop closer links with the EU so as to foster multipolarity (Forsberg
2004). Nevertheless, despite this stillborn project, Russia has continued to seek to
institutionalize cooperation within ESDP decision-making, notably through the call
for the creation of an analogue to the NATO-Russia Council. In response to US plans
for locating missile defense bases on EU territory, Russia called for precisely this
form of institutional political cooperation in the hope of fostering a joint position that
would force the US to reconsider their missile defense project. Hence on matters of
regional security policy, Russia has proved willing to accept the EU as a legitimate
partner.

This is not to say that cooperation has at all times been the name of the game.
On matters such as energy policy or relations with former Soviet satellites, Russia has
played the divide and rule card by privileging bilateral relations with individual EU
countries (Rontoyanni 2002; Leonard and Popescu 2007). This approach is evident in
Russia’s 2009 withdrawal from the Energy Charter Treaty, thereby lessening formal
cooperation with the EU on energy. Moreover, Russia has attempted to scupper the
EU-financed Nabucco gas pipeline through the development of a rival Gazprom
initiative (South Stream). However, it was Canada and not Russia that in 2009
formally opposed the EU’s application for observer status in the Arctic Council,
suggesting that this is an area of international cooperation where Russia is prepared to
accept negotiation via the EU rather than through bilateral relations.

Somewhat surprisingly, the US has been similarly ambivalent in its
willingness to engage with the EU as a fellow great power. Rhetorically, this was
perhaps most obvious in the prelude to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, where Secretary of
Defense Rumsfeld sought to exploit a divide between “Old and New Europe” over
whether to ally with the US. This attitude was equally on display during the creation of a so-called “coalition of the willing” specifically for the Iraq invasion, a device that allowed the US administration to bypass the EU in favor of bilateral relations with individual nation-states. Theoretically, this attitude can be understood from a realist perspective as the product of an American anticipatory fear of European balancing although some dispute that the continent has the capacity to conduct such a policy (Walt 2009).

Most concretely, it was during this same period that the US administration maneuvered to ensure that the nascent EU Constitutional Treaty did not encroach upon NATO competences. In this way, the US clearly articulated a policy of defending its interest in preserving regional leadership within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. Since 1998, the US has explicitly articulated three redlines that must not be breached in the context of EU-NATO relations: no ‘decoupling from NATO’, no ‘duplication’ of NATO command structures or alliance-wide resources, no ‘discrimination’ against NATO members that are not EU members (Archick and Gallis 2005). The 2003 proposal by France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg—excluding the UK—to create a European military headquarters, planning staff, and armaments agency in Belgium was interpreted on the other side of the Atlantic as a breach of these redlines. This led Washington to lobby hard for the insertion in the EU Constitutional Treaty of a formal recognition of “compatibility” between EU security and defence cooperation and NATO (Article I-41.2) (see Cimbalo 2004).

Nevertheless, the transatlantic divergence over Iraq did not preclude the US from seeking to engage with the EU over a variety of crucial security issues: counter-terrorism measures as well as both Iraqi and Afghan stabilization. On the former, the US sought out cooperation with the EU to devise common measures on sharing airline
passenger data, screening cargo, and the extradition of terrorist suspects. On the question of stabilizing post conflict Iraq and Afghanistan, the US sought to cooperate with the EU resulting in the disbursement of economic assistance through the auspices of the European Commission. Significant monies were pledged during the 2002 Tokyo Conference, the 2004 Berlin Conference, and the 2006 London Conference, taking EU development assistance to 8 billion euros (including member state contributions) for the period 2002-2010. However, on the issue of global economic governance, the Obama administration – supposedly more Atlanticist or at least more multilateral than its predecessor – preferred to work towards an agreement on coordinated fiscal stimuli through the G20, where the EU’s formal representation is strictly limited.

China is the existing great power with the least historically and institutionally sedimented relationship with Europe. Nevertheless, the EEC established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1975 and signed a trade agreement in 1978. Since the end of the Cold War and the dramatic development of the Chinese economy, China has been open to trade, economic and technological cooperation with the EU. In 2003 it launched an EU Policy Paper – the first of its kind on a foreign partner – setting out its belief that the ‘EU is a major force in the world.’\(^4\) However, EU-China summitry is often dismissed by experts as inconsequential (Bailes and Wetter 2007; Scott 2007, 13-38). Allied to this criticism is the fear that the EU’s divisions on trade policy are artfully exploited by China (Fox and Godemont 2009). Yet in the wake of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis the Chinese government has stressed its preference for a strong Euro as an alternative reserve currency to the dollar, leading to purchases of national debt across the Eurozone. In terms of security cooperation, bilateral

coordination pushed by China is very limited. A 2004 summit produced a Joint Declaration on Non-Proliferation and Arms Control, which has resulted in regular consultations at expert level. As a latecomer to international security cooperation it is perhaps not surprising that China’s bilateral desire to engage on security matters with the distant EU should be limited.

Of course, there is also a multilateral institutional framework that can be invoked to engage the EU in performing certain great power roles: the United Nations. What is significant here is the fact that the Security Council where China, Russia and the US largely hold sway as unquestioned permanent members—something not true of the UK or France—has repeatedly sought to work with the EU despite the fact that there is a very limited legal basis for formal EU representation within the UN. The EU has “observer status” only, which puts it on a par with entities such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and the Common Fund for Commodities.

2. Crisis management and war limitation. Since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, then, the EU has actively sought to regulate relations bilaterally with three other great power managers: the US, Russia and China. Moreover, the EU’s diplomatic relations with all three countries, in keeping with the definition of great power management articulated above, have been characterized by attempts to manage episodic crises.

Crisis management is a formal component of bilateral EU-Russia dialogue since the summit of 2000. Following Russian intervention in Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008, the EU immediately adopted a crisis-management response. With France holding the rotating Council presidency, President Sarkozy proposed a six-point ceasefire agreement that both parties eventually signed. This was followed by
the launch, through CFSP, of a civilian monitoring operation (EUMM) to oversee compliance with the ceasefire. However, crisis-management has also been pursued cooperatively. Russia participated, by sending a Russian Air Group, in the EU’s CSDP mission in Chad in 2009. Likewise, the separate counter-piracy operations conducted by both the EU and Russia in the Gulf of Aden have involved information exchange and immediate emergency assistance.

A range of bilateral agreements exists between the EU and US, covering trade, competition policy, extradition procedure, data and privacy rules (respectively, Meunier 2000; Damro 2006; Monar 2004 and ibid.). In addition, since the Transatlantic Declaration of 1990 there are annual EU-US summits discussing bilateral policy concerns. Crucially, bilateral treaties do not just cover anodyne trade matters (civil aviation or data protection for instance); they also exist for important foreign policy areas such as counter-terrorism. More informally, the US-EU summit provided the opportunity in 2005 for preserving the EU embargo on arms sales to China (in place since 1998), which is complementary to that established by the US Congress in 1990 (Scott 2007). Similarly, these annual summits provided the opportunity for healing the rift occasioned by the US intervention in Iraq in 2003.

Following the 2004 summit, the EU purposefully launched its EUJUST LEX mission to Iraq under the auspices of the CFSP. In this way, the EU’s bilateral relationship with the US concerns managing diplomacy with a great power as well as seeking to overcome episodic crises.

The EU relationship with China is also predicated upon a “strategic partnership” agreement (2003). Somewhat paradoxically, one of the successes of this partnership is a tacit understanding not to let the EU arms embargo derail bilateral negotiations on other subjects (Men 2008). These discussions centre on trade
questions, notably the issue of quotas on the importation of Chinese textiles, but also include largely fruitless dialogues on human rights. Beyond the formal bilateral partnership, EU leaders, represented by the so-called E-3 troika of Britain, France, and Germany, have also engaged with China directly to back their efforts – coordinated with the US – to halt Iran’s uranium enrichment program (Holslag 2011). Significantly, the EU and China agree upon negotiating with Iran via the UN Security Council so as to preclude the possibility for US unilateralism on this global security concern. (Ibid.)

Beyond the management of the general balance, the EU has been called upon to fulfil certain important tasks as an active participant in managing international affairs. Negotiations over Tehran’s nuclear ambitions, for example, actually began in a bilateral fashion between the EU (represented by a smaller cadre of Britain, France and Germany) and Iran in 2003 (Sauer, 2007). After a chronicle of failure and prevarication, these talks then migrated to the International Atomic Energy Agency, and eventually to the UN Security Council in 2006. This reflects a concrete co-optation of the EU (in the form of the G3 of Britain, France and Germany, a format that is not uncontroversial within EU circles) for a serious instance of great power management.

In response to the growing scale of maritime piracy off the coast of the failed state of Somalia, the UNSC invoked its chapter VII prerogatives to mandate an anti-piracy mission, beginning in 2008. As part of this mission, the EU launched operation ATLANTA to protect shipping lanes around the Gulf of Aden as well as World Food Program convoys. This deployment (some 2000 personnel) takes place alongside Combined Task Force 151 headed by the US, NATO Operation Allied Protector and autonomous maritime deployments by Russia and China. Consequently the EU is a
fully-fledged participant in the UN-led management of threats to the peace, an endeavor delegated to great powers.

Finally, it is also important to note that the EU has been actively courted as a participant to help solve the Syrian civil war, which erupted in 2011. Not only has the EU enacted sanctions on the Syrian regime at the request of the US and the Arab League of States, it has also been represented by the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy at the Action Group for Syria. The latter includes China, Russia and the US, who like the EU have endorsed the so-called Geneva plan for ending conflict in June 2012.

3. Regional order and spheres of influence. Turning to the maintenance of regional order and excluding others it is clear that the EU has achieved something akin to the first objective at least. EU enlargement, especially that pursued since 2004, is undoubtedly an extension of stability and democracy in line with the EU’s core interests. The mechanism that allows the EU to influence prospective member states is the list of conditions attached to accession. Not only do the conditions applied to candidate member states constrain their sovereignty (Grabbe 2005) but even once within the EU there are institutional procedures that can continue to enforce conditionality as is the case with the Mechanism for Cooperation and Verification imposed on Bulgaria and Romania (Trauner 2009). External influence—notably that wielded by Russia—on new member states’ or official candidates’ governments, is thus highly limited within the EU space. Indeed, the enlargement process remains autonomous when it comes to having the final say on new entrants as exemplified by the fact that European leaders have continued to resist Washington’s blandishments to conclude negotiation talks with Turkey.
Moreover, the EU has sought to gain control over the process of stabilizing its most hazardous neighbouring region: the Balkans. A stabilizing mission run by the EU took over the responsibility for providing security in Bosnia and Herzegovina from NATO in 2004 (Menon 2009). At the same time, by sponsoring direct bilateral talks between Serbia and Kosovo, the EU is on the verge of a European solution to an issue where Russia has continued to seek to play a leading role. By Europeanizing the management of instability in the Balkans, the EU has thus established a preponderant role in the maintenance of regional order, which is no mean feat given the divisions that made a decisive military response to the collapse of the former Yugoslavia impossible in the 1990s (Lucarelli 2000; Rathbun 2004). Similarly, the EU’s commitment to regional stabilization and crisis-management—even one involving another regional power—is further demonstrated in its post-conflict role in Georgia, where the EU leads the sole international monitoring mission, the EUMM. Tracing a desire to exclude other powers from areas in which the EU has not formally expanded is fraught with difficulty as this is not the self-image of soft or civilian power that the EU seeks to project. However, over matters such as stabilizing the Balkans using its own troops and its own incentives structure, resolving the Russian-Georgian conflict, as well as the vexing Turkish accession question, the EU has sought as much autonomy as possible.

In sum, it appears that whatever the merits and demerits of CFSP as a tool for generating robust and effective internal consensus, the EU is at least performing two – if not all three – of the principal roles of a great power. Not only is it managing relations bilaterally with great powers (the US, Russia and China) it is also negotiating crises directly with these powers on a range of contentious issues whilst also exercising in many respects regional primacy.
Conclusion

We have argued that despite its non-state nature the EU can fruitfully be analyzed as a great power manager in international relations. However, much justification for this perspective still needs to be done. The confrontation of Bull’s account of GPM with the methodological innovations of the practice turn uncovers more nuances than could be conveyed. Moreover, we have only been able to conduct two of the three necessary steps of a practice-approach to international politics: we have not engaged in a close historical analysis of how the practical logic of GPM created sufficiently strong expectations attached to EU foreign policy that serious political forces against further integration in the foreign and security sphere were overcome in specific instances. Nonetheless, we hope to have opened the way for further development of this promising approach. A number of possible implications can be outlined.

First, a GPM approach offers another way of explaining European integration history (c.f. Parsons 2002; Rosato 2011). Widening a power political lens beyond balancing, the Union’s existence itself is explicable in part as the desire of the former European great powers—Britain, Germany, France—to continue great power management, and the different means chosen. Whereas until the late 1950s British policy-makers did not consider supranational integration to be necessary for it to remain a ‘third force’ in world politics, the founders of the Union saw it in just these terms. Integration was both a way of managing their relations with one another—and particularly preventing German revanchism—and also protecting their region from the Soviet threat and a potential future American withdrawal.
Second, and relatedly, the argument also offers lessons of this re-reading for the future of the EU. This vision contrasts starkly with the pessimistic conclusion of Sebastian Rosato (2011), for whom the Union’s prospects are bleak. With no external threat since the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union—the key mechanism for European integration in his reading of EU history—there is no glue to hold Europe together. The argument here suggests, contrariwise, that there is a strong degree of inertia in favour of continued EU engagement in GPM. The Union has the foreign policy architecture in place, and other states—notably the big states of the US, Russia and China—expect a European voice. The EU 3 themselves—the UK, France and Germany—are also, for the moment at least, fully supportive.

Third, important implications flow in relation to Britain’s relations with Europe. UK policy-makers still consider Britain to be itself a great power manager (Morris 2011), sometimes alongside and sometimes through the EU. The potential severing of ties between London and Brussels, then, threatens Britain’s position on two counts: British leaders would not longer be able to ‘upload’ preferences to the European level, nor would a seat at the European table amplify Britain’s own influence. Indeed, this highlights perhaps the most puzzling aspect of Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron’s decision to promise an in/out referendum on UK membership: why is he turning his back on a tradition of British leaders prioritizing power politics over the views of a sceptical electorate? A GPM perspective would draw attention to the expectations attached to the great power role, including the views of key others like America in its construction, and pose the question whether membership of a faltering Europe still holds the key to international influence.

Finally, important implications for EU-US relations follow. Going forward, as a great power the EU can be expected to attempt to place its own stamp on how the
international system should be constituted. This is inevitable, and should not be viewed as a bad thing by Washington: the EU is more likely to share the American vision of international order than China’s or Russia’s. As Braumoeller has noted (2008), the existence of more than one great power manager in the international system has a tendency to lead to conflict, but again conflict is far more likely with those of a far different ideological persuasion. As many of both sides of the Atlantic have stressed for the past half-century, the Americans are better off facing a multipolar world alone with a strong and united Europe, even with the occasional disagreement.

References


