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American Perceptions of European weakness: US Elite Discourse on Europe's role in the World.

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Abstract

In spite of significant advances in foreign policy integration among EU member-states and the deployment of large numbers of European troops in US-led military missions abroad, perceptions of Europe among the US foreign policy community are - almost without exception - of a weak continent in decline and lacking resolve.

The process of how actors form reputations about ally-states remains a theoretically under-developed subject. When a community of ideologically and institutionally diverse actors comes to a uniform evaluation of what is otherwise considered a highly-contested concept, this lack of variation merits critical examination.

This paper outlines the mapping of a dominant discourse on Europe among the US foreign policy community, and proposes a social psychological explanation for the surprising uniformity of opinion on the subject.

The implications of the findings are both theoretical and practical. They help to explain the process by which international role identities are developed, specifically regarding Europe. Secondly, they suggest new ways of explaining the dominance of particular discourses. Finally the findings are of practical import to European policymakers who want to know how their American counterparts perceive Europe, and why they see it as they do.

Introduction

"We just don't talk about the EU, and perhaps we should care, but we don't"

- Jeremy Shapiro, while an Obama Campaign Foreign Policy Advisor in 2008. Currently Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia.

Europe's role in twenty-first century international politics is an ongoing puzzle. In spite of well-known limitations, remarkable strides have been taken in foreign policy integration, most recently with the Lisbon Treaty reforms. Over the last ten years, the EU has executed over 30 joint security and defense operations, from Chad to Somalia. No joint operations had taken place before 2000. Outside of the EU, Europeans appear to be at least as engaged in international crises as they have been in previous decades. More European troops have served in missions either led by, or in close cooperation with the US in the last fifteen years, than in the 55 years after World War Two combined (Giegerich and Nicholl, 2010).

Many in Europe have observed that Europe's role in global trade regulation, development aid, and in promoting peace and democracy beyond its borders are unmatched, even by the US (Leonard 2004, Moravcsik 2010). No other region or power plays such a dominant role in these areas. In a liberal discourse of this kind, Europe is arguably more influential in global affairs than the US.

Yet in spite of all this, the US foreign policy community's perceptions of European influence and resolve are negative, and getting worse. The sources gathered by this paper exhibit a dominant narrative, running across several cleavages, that presents European influence in global affairs as increasingly weak on several counts: political, economic and military. Evaluations of Europe's "soft power" capabilities are few and far between, the focus being on a realist discourse of traditional power capabilities.

What explains this apparent divergence between European growing involvement

and coordination on global security matters, and its diminishing reputation? Operating within a constructivist framework, this paper employs discourse analysis to map out how US elites constitute Europe's role in the World and seeks to explain the dominance of a discourse of weakness by employing theories of cognitive biases drawn from social psychology.

In terms of structure, the paper will begin by addressing the construction of Europe's role identity and the contribution social psychology explanations for reputation-formation might play in understanding this process. It will then explain the methodology used to code 45 texts for discourse on European weakness, and will then present the findings with selected quotes to illustrate the results. Having outlined the findings, the paper will then apply the psychological explanations for reputation-formation to the results, underlining how the patterns conform with theoretical projections. Finally I will briefly address some counter-arguments before concluding with suggested further avenues for research.

Constructing the EU's role identity

"Identities are not pre-given, rather they are learned and then reinforced in response to how actors are treated by significant others" (Wendt 1999, 327)

Europe and the EU present us with an unusually fertile space in international politics for discursive construction. Indeed, there has been a wealth of constructivist scholarship on the internal identity of the EU, the construction of European identities among national elites, the interplay of national foreign policies, and conceptualization of its international role (Börzel 1999; Torreblanca 2001; Olsen 2002; Grabbe 2003; Tonra 2003; Tonra and Christiansen 2004; Wong 2005). These writers all seek to understand the development of the EU's changing roles by looking from the inside out. The debate is so lively in fact, that writers accept that there is no consensus in the literature as to what the EU's role identity is (Manners and Whitman 2010, 232).

As an unprecedented political experiment, we should expect variation of discourse on the EU - rather than dominance - to be the norm. The pattern of dominance discovered by this paper presents us with an unusual puzzle in this light.

How do certain narratives come to dominate discourse?

Discourse theory tells us that successful narratives (i.e., those that can become instantiated or accepted as common knowledge) must possess a number of basic qualities[1]. But this merely tells us the general qualities of sticky narratives, it does not tell us why a particular narrative among many others – all possessing the same structural qualities – is more likely to dominate discourse.

What variables determine the success or otherwise of any one narrative is difficult to say. A theory on this question cannot fill all the gaps between cause and effect, but Jervis advises that at a basic level, it should be shown that the same phenomena can be perceived in different ways, and that in the process of ordering and structuring our understanding of the world, such narratives have a framing effect not only on the range of policy choices available to actors (Jervis, 1976). This paper introduces a social psychology approach to the debate on discursive dominance, suggesting that patterns of beliefs among a policy community with a shared identity may be explained by reference to cognitive determinants.

Psychological Explanation for Reputation Formation:

According to Mercerian explanations of reputation formation, cognitive and psychological processes may operate on actors (the US foreign policy community) and lead them to view their allies (European countries) as

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[1] They must simplify a large number of phenomena to produce an easily communicated and understood story. This story must allow for new events and data to be integrated into the explanatory framework.

irresolute, and their adversaries as resolute. (Mercer, 1996). These patterns of perception can occur regardless of the way in which these allies actually behave. Key among the relevant processes are: the desirability bias, confirmatory attributions bias, egocentric bias and self-serving bias.

This approach is drawn from social psychology theories of individual cognition and group behaviour. Whereas Mercer used these cognitive explanations to explain how reputations form in the mind of *individual decision-makers*, this study uses these tools to explain *shared group beliefs*, expressed as narratives. However, the cognitive patterns outlined by social psychology are intrinsically social processes. They operate on the actor by virtue of his identification as a member of a particular "in-group". Confirmatory attributions bias, egocentric and self-serving biases have regularly been advanced by social psychologists as explaining patterns of collective behaviour by members of an "in-group" when interacting with an "out-group" (Tajfel and Turner 1986, 7 – 25). Thus using this framework to explain collective ways our subjects understand Europe should not be problematic.

In the following section, we will move on to examine the methodology employed to conduct the qualitative analysis undertaken of 45 texts produced by the US foreign policy community. The findings are of a dominant discourse of European weakness and decline, which crosscuts political affiliation, ideology and bureaucratic position.

Methodology

This study was carried out using qualitative, in-depth documentary analysis of 45 texts produced between 2003 and 2010, on the subject of Europe, EU-US relations, NATO-EU relations and the transatlantic relationship. The analysis therefore relates to discourse on European countries in a variety of contexts; as members of the EU, NATO, the O.S.C.E, or simply considered as countries within a region. By discussing and assessing European countries as a group, US foreign

policy discourse builds a space which groups diverse European actors in these many different contexts together. Statements on individual countries was excluded as the focus is on these states only when they are considered as part of a "European" group – accepting the terms set by the discourse itself. The sample was coded for political ideology and representative of a liberal/conservative balance.

The sources chosen were the closest available sources to the public foreign policy debate. While the sample cannot be said to be "complete", steps were take to ensure that the texts were drawn evenly from all years across the time period (2003 – 2010), were representative of official/non-official authors, and political ideology.

Why Include Non-Government sources?

Policy institute publications from influential think tanks play an important role in the analysis. In the US context, think tanks are often early predictors of policy developments and articulate a synthesis of public and private debates. The ideological bent of some of these actors can also flesh out the parameters of the discourse. Indeed, factions within the US Foreign Policy process have often produced their arguments and hypotheses in think-tank settings. Arguably, these sources are a more frank and open articulation of US perceptions on foreign and security matters.

Leading writers within this community assert a claim to sophisticated, specialist knowledge of the field of foreign policy analysis, and can in some senses be considered an "epistemic community" with expert status that allows for privileged access to decision-makers and the foreign policy process generally (Hopf 1992, Foley 2008). The documents are themselves designed with a view to influencing these other actors, contextualizing myriad complex phenomena and events and presenting them in easily understood analyses supporting practical proposals.

The movement of personnel between think tanks and White House Administrations also appears to be remarkably fluid, in both directions. At least 18 of the authors sourced in the non-government group held, or went on to hold

positions at the highest levels in the State Department, the cabinet and the President's staff[2]. This indicates several points. Firstly, that the sources selected were influential and highly-regarded contributors to policy discourse, secondly, that the think-tank community itself is one of the leading forums, if not the pre-eminent one, for "expert" foreign policy discourse.

To avoid selection bias with think–tank sources, I used a cross section of prominent institutes, representative of the full ideological field of US foreign policy research. Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo's work on ideological positioning of research institutes was used to select a balanced sample of institutes[3]. The ADA ideological scores cited were also used to ensure that statements by members of congress were representative of political ideology. The following is the list of think tanks selected, with an ideological score based on a spectrum where "0" is the most conservative position, and "100" is the most liberal position. They are ordered from most liberal to most conservative:

Cato Institute (L): 60.3

Council on Foreign Relations (L): 60.3

Brookings Institute (L): 53.3

Center for Strategic and International Studies (C): 46.3

International Institute for Strategic Studies (C): 41.2

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[2] See Appendix Two for list of these personnel.

[3] Groseclose, Tim and Milyo, Jeffrey 2005, "A Measure of Media Bias" in "The Quarterly Journal of Economics" November 2005, Issue 4. Using the Congressional Record, Groseclose and Milyo coded all citations of research institutes by members of congress between January 1 1993 and Dec 31 2002. The researchers then used the ten-year average ADA scores (an evaluation of the ideological position of each member of congress based upon their voting record) of the members to place the think tanks on an ideological spectrum. The work assumes ideological proximity between the congressman and the source he/she cites – this assumption is verified by the results which conform to generally held wisdom on the ideological leanings of the groups measured. It is also reaffirmed by the groups' own descriptions of themselves, often as "conservative" or "progressive".

Heritage Foundation (C): 20.0

(L) = Liberal, (C) = Conservative.

The institutes selected are well known and Groseclose and Milyo's study calculated that they were all within the top 20% most cited institutes (including those not focused on foreign policy). This indicates that the sample selected represents the most influential and relevant organizations within foreign policy research.

The Dominant Discourse – Weak Partner In Decline

The discourse of European countries as weak partners in decline encompasses a group of themes and concepts which were common to almost all sources examined. While tone and emphasis varied between each text, and each text did not include all of these themes, together they form a coherent narrative about European actors, which depicts them as weak, with diminishing prospects and diminishing relevance to the US. The themes will be assessed below, including select quotes from the text.

Fig. 1: Narrative themes coded in the analysis.

Discourse of Strength	Discourse of Weakness
Military strength / Resolve	Military weakness
Political strength / Unity / Leadership	Political weakness / Disunity / No leadership
Economic growth / Innovation	Economic weakness / Poor growth prospects
Foreign policy success / Resolve	Foreign policy failure / Lack of resolve
"Soft" power indicators	Diminished importance / Irrelevance
Population management	Demographic weakness
Positive prospects	Uncertain future / Collapse

Narrative themes:

1.Military weakness

The primary focus of writers within this theme was the relatively low military spending by European countries as a percentage of GDP and its decline since the end of the Cold War. This is not to say writers considered European investment in military capabilities was sufficient before 1989: military spending in Europe was "inadequate, now pathetic" (Carpenter and Tupy 2010)[4].

Republican and Democrat administration officials appear similarly concerned. In 2006, Secretary for Defense Donald Rumsfeld called for greater European military spending (Rumsfeld 2006), a call which Kurt Volker, a senior State Dept. official echoed in the same year:

"European publics do not currently see the well-being and the prosperity and the political development and democracy that is enjoyed within Europe as intimately linked to the investment and security in defense … we have to come back to that." (Volker 2006).

Current Secretary for Defense Robert Gates returned to this phenomenon: "The long term demilitarization of Europe" (Gates, 2010) where European leaders and the general public were becoming averse to military force and spending.

The implications of "demilitarization" are several according to unofficial writers: Firstly, "European free-riding" increases the burden and threats on the American public (CATO Handbook, 2008), secondly, it means that in the long run, Europe's influence on geopolitical matters will be minor. (Bandow, 2010), even more alarming, Secretary Gates suggested that patterns of low spending may in fact incite enemy aggression: "… real or perceived weakness can be a temptation to aggression" (Gates, 2010).

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[4] It is interesting to note that combined European military spending represents 21% of global military spending. While this is dwarfed by US spending (approximately 43% of total) it is still considerably more than China's 5%, Russia's 3% and India's 2% (Moravcsik 2010, 93).

As for the EU's recent security and defense missions, this topic receives scant attention or notice from official actors, who repeatedly underline the importance of NATO as the central component of European security management. When asked to name CSDP missions they were aware of, all interviewees struggled to name more than one mission.

Unofficial actors are more explicit, describing the EU's military performance as "a flop" (McNamara, 2010). This is perhaps unsurprising given the relatively recent development of EU Security and Defense policy. What is more surprising is that in spite of over 30 combat operations conducted under security and defense policy, none of the texts referred to any these operations directly – with the exception of the dismissal of the EU policing operation in Afghanistan as "a complete failure" in one text (McNamara 2010).

2. Foreign Policy / Political Weakness

Criticisms of Europe under this heading ranged broadly from the argument that "there is no European foreign policy" (McNamara, 2010, Pera 2005) to a perception of weak resolve or "appeasement" (Hulsman and Gardiner, 2005).

Leadership was a focus of criticism, with several authors writing that current European leaders were vulnerable domestically, and were unlikely to take risks in foreign policy issues or European integration. This criticism of the weakness of European leaders was noted throughout the time period 2003 – 2010 (Lebl, 2004, Kupchan 2004, Freedman 2008, Haass 2010, McNamara, 2010).

In terms of the EU, authors highlighted a lack of common foreign policy on Russia, Turkey and China, and noted that this left the EU with a "credibility problem" (Jones, 2009). This led writers to be skeptical about the idea that EU Common Foreign Policy was effective in any sense: "The Europeans have not yet demonstrated … they're capable of generating that much on their own" (Freedman, 2008). Central to this lack of common approaches is the problem of disunity and disagreement, a well-documented and studied challenge to common

foreign and security policy. The Iraq crisis is the most noted historical event related to the issue (Lebl, 2004).

When EU countries did pursue a common approach, non-official actors described it as either misguided or irresponsible: Heritage described the EU's approach to Iran as "Chamberlain-esque", while the lifting of the arms embargo on China was "irresponsible" (Hulsman and Gardiner, 2005).

Unsurprisingly, the sample of official texts did not contain explicit descriptions of EU foreign policies as "failures". Rather, references to EU foreign policy were confined to noting success "in eastern Europe and the Caucasus" while in broader international topics, the emphasis was on encouraging the EU to work more closely with NATO (Clinton, 2010, National Security Strategy 2010). Despite convention, some official actors noted occasional concerns about weakness of resolve:

> *"There's a sense of appeasement or cutting back on strength or perseverance in Europe."*
- (Senator Allen, 2004)

Predictions for the future of EU foreign policy by several actors were distinctly pessimistic. A senior official at the State Dept's Europe Bureau was skeptical about the likelihood that the Lisbon Treaty innovations would change much:

"Our fear is a weak and inward-focused Europe … the signs are that Lisbon may not deliver a more united EU" (Shapiro, 2010).

Long-running concerns about the capabilities-expectations gap also endure, with one Senior State Dept official noting the need to turn rhetoric into action. The juxtaposition between aspirations and results is instructive:

*"We need to build on cooperative <u>spirit</u>, to move forward **in substance** … build on*

*ideas, with **concrete action**"⁵* (my emphasis)

- (Private briefing, 2010).

3. Weakness Leads To Irrelevance

The fusion of the themes of weakness into a broader discourse is accompanied – unsurprisingly – by occasional dismissals of the role of Europe, and the EU in particular, as irrelevant. This theme is relatively new, and primarily evident in texts from 2009/2010, perhaps reflecting disillusionment with European impact in Afghanistan, or the attitudes of the new administration. Discussions of the Obama Administration's approach to transatlantic relations have been ongoing, inflamed by certain events, such as President Obama's decision not to attend the biannual EU-US Summit in Madrid in 2010[6].

" The EU is not of interest to White House … Obama is a globalist, not a Trans-Atlanticist … Transatlantic partnership will be one of several strands in Obama multilateralism, not the strand." (Jones, 2009)

Not only is the EU not of interest, it is also seen as irrelevant. Commentators have dismissed any prospects of the EU exerting a significant effect on international politics:

"… now the EU's pretensions of international power are widely treated with derision, even contempt" (Bandow, 2010)

Europe is *"not a focus of interest any more … DC people don't understand the institutions of EU"* (Conley, 2010).

In an article entitled "Goodbye to Europe as a High-Ranking Power" one former Assistant Secretary of State went further, saying that the US will now look

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[6] These summits are the primary forum for wide-ranging discussions on EU-US Cooperation. President Obama was the first US President to decline an invitation since the summits began.

elsewhere when building alliances, and that the transatlantic partnership *"now counts for less than any other time since the 1930s"* (Haass, 2010). Once again, this theme was present in research institutes of all ideological hues.

Comments such as these, suggesting the White House was turning away from Europe, are so widespread that Secretary Clinton took the unusual step of explicitly denying this was the case:

"Others have voiced concern that the Obama Administration is so focused on foreign policy challenges elsewhere in the world that Europe has receded in our list of priorities … in fact, European security remains an anchor of U.S. foreign and security policy" (Clinton, 2010).

Metaphors are repeatedly employed by the current administration when describing relations with Europe. European security is variously described as an "anchor" of US foreign policy, whereas relations with European allies are the "cornerstone" of security policy (2010 National Security Strategy). These terms imply stability and permanence, but official descriptions of the relationship tend to abstractions such as these, rather than the explicit evaluations we see in unofficial texts. This is perhaps to be expected in rhetorical texts, but it is difficult for the researcher to adjudicate as to the precise meanings of such descriptions.

Overview – Weakness, Irrelevance, Decline

The sum total of these thematic elements is a discourse which presents European efforts to forge a more coordinated and assertive response to international challenges as severely lacking in credibility. Political, military and economic factors all combine within this narrative to suggest that Europe's role in the World - either in NATO or the EU - is weak and will diminish further. The National Intelligence Council's own survey of American foreign policy commentators paints a gloomy picture of Europe's long-term prospects as a marginal figure on the World stage:

 "… A hobbled giant distracted by internal bickering and competing national

agendas, and less able to translate its economic clout into global influence."
- (NIC, 2008)

Readers will note that the rationalist metrics of power employed by the sources and the conclusions they draw rest upon a traditional realist worldview. The writers generally assume that due to diminished military spending and economic growth, Europe's global influence will decline in proportion to its percentage of aggregate global power resources. This paper does not address itself to evaluating competing views of influence advanced by realists, institutionalists and constructivists, but it should be noted that the power capabilities identified by the authors align with a particular theoretical perspective, and that established alternative lenses - such as liberal institutionalism - could present significantly differing conclusions using other rationalist data[7]

While there appears to be relative consensus in the US foreign policy community on Europe's role in global politics, attitudinal studies have shown that the same is not the case in Europe, or even Asian or African countries (Holland and Chalaban, 2010). There, competing descriptions of the EU as a civilian power, a superstate, a military power, an economic power and a normative power are among some of the narratives that writers have been identified (Holland and Chalaban 2010, Leonard 2004). Moreso than most other international actors, we would expect the EU to be the subject of many competing and unstable discourses, given its unusual construction and recent evolution. So why might American actors produce such a homogenous and inflexible discourse of Europe as weak and in decline, contrasting so strongly with the many and changing roles attributed to it by others?

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[7] See for instance the conclusion by Andrew Moravcsik that Europe is the "Second Superpower" arising from what he sees as its unrivalled economic, institutional and normative influence (Moravcsik 2010, 91 – 99).

The Social Psychology Explanation for Reputation Formation

It appears counter-intuitive that in spite of so many differing cleavages (Presidential Administration, Party affiliation, Bureaucratic position, Ideological position) on a matter that is so hotly contested by other groups (ie: scholars and commentators within Europe), this particular group of diverse actors has reached an apparent consensus.

Several phenomena from social psychology can provide us with insights into why this inflexible, homogenous and seemingly illogical discourse persists.

Phenomena explaining Inflexibility and Homogeneity:

1. The Desirability explanation for attribution.
2. Confirmatory Attributions Patterns.
3. Salience effects
4. Egocentric and self-serving biases

1. The Desirability explanation for attribution

According to Mercer, when we explain the behavior of members of an out-group (either allies or adversaries) we oftentimes make attributions based on our desires (Mercer 1996, 9-10, 45- 48). In the case of policy-making, actors attribute success in achieving a desirable outcome to their own policies and actions, not to the disposition of the other character. In the long run, by repeatedly explaining away the desirable behavior of our allies, as either due to our own influence or other situational factors, we deny our allies the possibility of developing a reputation for resolve.

By contrast, the undesirable behavior of members of an out-group is overwhelmingly attributed to their character traits – that is we employ dispositional attributions. Reputations are constructed by aggregating dispositional attributions, not situational ones. Because of this, an out-group will almost always get a reputation for undesirable behavior. In the case of

adversaries, this would be a reputation for aggression and resolve, in our case – European *allies* – the reputation is one of weakness and a lack of resolve.

Fig. 1: How Actors form opinions about their allies:

Undesirable behavior -> dispositional attribution -> forms reputation

Desirable behavior -> situational attribution -> does not form reputation

Do such trends really occur at the level of international politics where experts employ sophisticated techniques to assess risk and predict behavior? Mercer argues that it does. A useful example is provided by President Reagan's responses to the shooting down of civilian aircraft by US and Soviet forces during the Cold War. Whereas the shooting of an Iranian aircraft by the US Navy (the in-group) was explained away by reference to circumstance: "the action taken was understandable … they believed they were under attack", the Soviet shooting of Korean Air Jet 007 was an "act of barbarism born of a society which wantonly disregards … human life".

An example from our own sources may help to illustrate the pattern of reasoning regarding allies.

Example: Explaining an ally's undesirable behavior – dispositional attribution.

"Humanitarian disasters and ethnic conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and Haiti have more than demonstrated that the EU lacks the tools [trait 1], *expertise and political will* [trait 2] *to do much of anything in a crisis, other than aggrandize further power from its member states. This is just another spectacular example of the failure of EU leadership* [trait 3]" (McNamara 2010)

Here our source explains the failure of the EU to deal with a local conflict by reference to fundamental character flaws – military weakness [trait 1], political weakness [trait 2], weak leadership [trait 3].

Because the author has ascribed the undesirable behavior of the ally to its character traits (see 1, 2, 3) this dispositional attribution is amalgamated with other such attributions, to reinforce the reputation of the ally as weak, and lacking resolve.

The absence of any situational attribution for European foreign policy failure in our sources appears to support Mercer's thesis that actors do not explain the behavior of allies in this way. But in order to prove that such explanations are plausible, it is useful to consider what a situational attribution in the cases mentioned might look like:

Example B: Explaining an ally's undesirable behavior – situational attribution.

While the Bosnia and Kosovo crises of the 1990s were widely regarded by Europeans themselves as failures, these events occurred over 15 years ago, in very different circumstance (situation 1). These crises have in fact played a very direct role in the creation of new arrangements and capabilities that would allow for more swift action[8] (situation 2). Furthermore, the development of a new framework governing the conditions for humanitarian intervention in international law (situation 3) means that states now know what kind of action is permissible in response to human rights abuses or genocide. The context and circumstances in which Europe might respond to a similar crisis today, are very different, thus we might expect a more swift and muscular response.

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[8] The development of common security and defense policy to allow for swift decision making, rapid reaction forces to provide the physical capacity to intervene at short notice and a High Representative for Foreign Affairs to coordinate the response.

The Persistence of Reputations for Weakness

Why should such reputations persist in spite of changing circumstances and new developments? In our case, Europe has committed more troops in US-led overseas missions in the last 15 years than in any other period of the post-World War Two era. The EU developed its own military operations capabilities in 2000 and has employed them on thirty occasions since. While EU military forces are still not comparable to those of some other states, it seems surprising that perceptions of European strength would actually progressively decline (as our findings reveal) when more European troops are serving abroad, and EU military capacity has been significantly improved. Even if we accept the terms of a rationalist conception of power and force commitment (troop numbers, military spending and capacity), US perceptions of European influence do not appear to reflect these realities.

Why does this happen? To understand these patterns, we must look to a number of cognitive processes that social psychologists have identified.

1. **Confirmatory Attributions Patterns:**

Kulik's concept of "confirmatory expectations patterns" can help explain the apparently illogical persistence of the discourse of Europe as weak and getting weaker (Kulik 1983, 1171 – 1181). His experiments showed that we explain away behavior that does not accord with our expectations. Thus, once a reputation for weakness has been applied to our ally, it proves remarkably sticky and resistant to change in spite of countervailing evidence. Pettigrew applied this theory to race-relations in America (Pettigrew 1979, 461). Members of an in-group (White Americans) tended to explain positive behavior by the out-group (African Americans) by reference to transitory situational forces, rather than disposition – this meant that their prejudices were never challenged. By contrast, anti-social behavior in their own group is seen as situationally-caused.

In our case, we have already noted historical events where Europe's response to foreign policy crises was seen as weak (i.e.: Balkans crisis in the 1990s). Assuming for a moment that this initial attribution was a "rational" appraisal of the events, Kulik's theory would suggest that this reputation would remain sticky in spite of countervailing evidence. The role of current EU policing and civilian reconstruction operations in Kosovo, combined with the development of new rapid reaction forces which would be capable of responding to a similar situation, should at the least, lead commentators to consider that EU capacities are now significantly more effective than they were in 1993. However, none of our sources even mentioned the current EU mission in Kosovo, or the development of rapid reaction forces. This might be considered evidence of "selection bias" which fits within confirmatory attributions patterns.

2. Salience effects: We make attributions based on what we can attend to, what we can most easily see (Mercer 1996, 50). We can clearly see our own policy, less easily the situation of our ally. Decision-makers care most about the success or failure of their own policies – thus, this shapes their interpretation of an outcome. For instance, US policymakers are more likely to explain success in US-led missions to their own policies, rather than the contribution of their allies, simply because the latter factor is more difficult to apprehend.

Similarly, talk of the EU's soft power capabilities seems confined to European writers (Leonard 2004) and this may be explained by the fact that it is simply quite difficult to discern or measure the success of EU institution-building and multilateralism in achieving foreign policy objectives. Counting tanks is easier than counting increments of norm exportation, hence the emphasis by our sources on defense spending as a proportion of GDP, and deployable troop numbers as indicators of strength.

2. ***Self-serving and Egocentric biases:*** We take credit for positive outcomes and deny responsibility for negative ones (Gilovich et al 2002, 15). Decision-makers are likely to explain desirable outcomes in terms of

policy success (situational attributes) rather than the adversary's character or other calculations (dispositional attributes). If there is a failure, it is due to the ally's character.

In the case of the Bosnian Wars, the Srebenica massacre was presented as a product of European failure, not a failure of the International community, which had mandated a restricted role for UN peacekeeping troops stationed there. Nor was US policy towards Serbia and its leader Slobodan Milosevic to blame. The success of the NATO mission in achieving ending the Bosnia Wars is attributed to American leadership, not European involvement (McNamara 2010).

Counter-arguments:

Before concluding I will address two counter-arguments which sceptical readers might suggest.

1. The discourse of weakness is an objective reflection of material realities:

It has been noted from the beginning that this paper operates in a theoretical framework that argues there are no pre-existing material realities and we subjectively constitute strength by determining which metrics are appropriate. This means that any selection of material capabilities to measure power must be historically contingent and arising from the observers' own subjective judgements as to what is meant by strength and how it should be apprehended in real life.

However, accepting momentarily a rationalist claim that power-projection capabilities can be objectively measured, the argument is still problematic on a number of points.

Firstly, there is no doubt that Europe is militarily "weaker" than the United States, but such a statement tells us little about any non-US actor in an international structure characterized by American hegemony. Realists favor relative power capabilities as indicators of strength, but the sources themselves present no justification for why European capabilities should not be judged

relative to past performance. Arguing that Europe is "weaker than it should be" rather than "weaker than it was five years ago" implies either a subjective judgment as to what an appropriate level of European strength is, or a realist assumption that relative power capabilities determine influence. None of the sources studied explicitly defined or justified these benchmarks.

At the least, rational assessments of European strength and resolve should note incremental increases in troop deployments, military capabilities and foreign policy coordination. In spite of these demonstrable incremental improvements, the discourse asserts that European strength and material capabilities are actually in decline.

The existence of many and varied competing discourses about Europe's role and influence in the World[9] suggest that there is no single, verifiable way to measure power as an objective commodity (Elgstrom and Smith 2006, Manners and Whitman 2010, Holland and Chalaban 2010). Unlike many of these competing evaluations of Europe's role, the dominant discourse's measurement of Europe's strength rests on a realist worldview which assumes that power is determined in a zero-sum competition between states to mobilize coercive power resources – which stem from gross demographic and economic power, converted into military resources (Mearsheimer 2001, 55 – 83). The role of constructivist scholarship is to highlight that while such an understanding of strength can be appear to be reasonable, there are many other possible understandings of the same phenomena.

All of these points raise serious questions about the way in which actors process information - and by extension - undermines the notion that discourses are objective reflections of material reality.

2.Foreign Policy experts aren't that dumb.

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[9] Consider for instance the many rational measures of influence examined by liberal institutionalists (Trade levels, norms exporting, development spending and civilian power).

It is perhaps unsettling to think that in spite of the training and the sophisticated analysis we associate with foreign policymakers and commentators, they may in fact be quite susceptible to basic flaws of judgment. Proponents of the cognitive biases approach have long been criticized for applying lessons learned from decision-making experiments conducted primarily on college students in laboratory settings to actors operating in higher stakes contexts with greater expertise and access to knowledge (Ortmann and Hertwig 2000, cited in Gilovich et al 2002).

However, recent studies have responded to these criticisms head-on and have further justified the approach based on natural experiments conducted in "expert settings" Bondt and Thaler analysed the behaviour of financial analysts and traders who receive expert training and employ sophisticated statistical analysis when making decisions. In their analysis they found that investors exhibited biased expectations of future earnings when certain patterns of group behaviour occurred. Over a five year period, such biases were found to reduce earnings significantly (Bondt and Thaler 2010, 678 – 686). In light of the findings that expert personnel are subject to cognitive biases in real life high-stakes situations, the operation of cognitive biases on members of the foreign policy community seems less surprising.

It may be possible to explain the dominance of this discourse in this paper in different ways – competing or complementary to the cognitive processes approach. The purpose was not to test whether cognitive processes definitively determined the dominance of one particular discourse – it would be difficult to find any theory which could explain the opaque patterns of behaviour, beliefs and narratives in incontrovertible ways – rather the aim was to generally verify the role of cognitive biases on the formation of beliefs about the Other, as expressed through narratives.

Conclusion

This paper opened with a quote from a senior Obama advisor, who in a rare moment of honesty said *"We just don't talk about the EU, and perhaps we should*

care, but we don't" (Shapiro 2008). This statement can be interpreted in different ways, but it seems clear that the advisor himself had detected something unusual or problematic in the way the foreign policy community considers Europe's global role. At the least, it is an admission that foreign policy experts are human and may not always examine phenomena in the way they "should".

The concept of the dominant discourse of European weakness answers the question of how the US foreign policy establishment understands Europe's global role. It also gives an indication of how beliefs about other state actors are expressed as narratives and shaped over time. The coding of the discursive discovery ultimately supported a cognitive explanation for discursive dominance.

The explanation brought together complementary approaches from social psychology and constructivist discourse analysis to enhance our understanding of how Europe is constituted by its pre-eminent partner. This is an innovative approach to explaining why certain narratives persist over time, and a challenge to constructivists to search for convincing explanations for discursive dominance and persistence beyond the notion of "narrative self-perpetuation".

Future scholarship examining US discourse on Europe might examine whether the phenomenon of this dominant discourse is a product of the post-9/11 environment – did this event forge greater consensus among the foreign policy establishment on external actors? How has this discourse changed since the Cold War? Similar examinations might be made of US foreign policy discourse on other allies and partners, to see if the same processes apply.

The analysis also suggested that underlying different discourses on Europe's role were differing conceptions of power: soft and hard, for example. Further research could examine whether the way in which European foreign policy actors perceive the US is shaped by significantly different conceptions of influence in global politics.

For the US foreign policy community, the findings present difficult questions about how research and policy analysis is conducted. Relevant policy dialogue

depends upon critical and constant questioning of widely-held beliefs and preconceptions. This appears to be conspicuously absent in policy analysis of Europe's global role.

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Appendix One: Source Texts :

I. Unofficial Actors - listed by research institute.

Brookings Institution

TEXTS:

1. Transcript of Brookings Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) 2010 Annual Conference, June 2, Washington D.C:

2. 2008 Brookings Transatlantic Conference

3. The European Rescue Plan: Opportunities and Limitations (Domenico Lombardi, May 2010)

4. Greece, the EU Summit and the Future of the Euro (Domenico Lombardi, March 2010)

5. Ripples Across the Pond: The Impact of the European External Action Service in Washington (Justin Vaisse, July 2010)

6. The Coming Clash? The US and Multilateralism under Obama (Bruce Jones, 2009)

Cato Insitute

TEXTS:

1. European Union Defence Policy: An American Perspective (Leslie S. Lebl, 2004, Policy Analysis no. 516)

2. U.S. Defense Spending Subsidizes European Free-Riding Welfare States (Ted Galen Carpenter and Marian L. Tupy, July 2010)

3. When Will the Eurozone Collapse? (Vaclav Klaus, in Economic Development Bulletin, no. 14, May 2010)

4. CATO Handbook for policymakers (2008)

5. So Much For the European Project (Doug Bandow, in The American Spectator, July 2010)

Council on Foreign Relations

TEXTS:

1. Goodbye to Europe as a High-ranking Power (Richard Haass, in Financial Times, May 2010)

2. Is NATO Dead or Alive? (Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, April 2008)

3. The 50th Anniversary of the EU: Re-launch Immediately To Counter the Risk of Disaggregation (Charles Kupchan, March 2007)

4. Renewing the Atlantic Partnership (Taskforce report, chairs: Henry Kissinger, Lawrence Summers, Project Director: Charles Kupchan 2004)

5. Sarkozy's Europe is Good for Obama (Charles Kupchan, Federiga Bindi, Justin Vaisse, 2009)

6. The Transatlantic Turnaround (Charles Kupchan, March 2008 in Current History).

Heritage Foundation

TEXTS:

1. President Bush Should Advance a New U.S. Vision for Europe (John Hulsman and Nile Gardiner in Backgrounder, No. 1825, Feb. 2005)

2. EU Army to the Rescue? Heaven Help Us From Our Friends (Helle Dale, October 2003)

3. A Conservative Vision for US Policy towards Europe (John Hulsman and Nile Gardiner, Backgrounder No. 1803, Feb. 2004)

4. Is Europe Doomed to Continued Economic Stagnation? (Sally McNamara, Heritage Lectures No. 1040, June 2007)

5. Is the EU America's Friend or Foe? (John Blundell, Heritage Lectures No.

983, Sept. 2006)

6. Europe, America, and the Continental Drift (Marcello Pera, Heritage Lectures No. 978, Oct. 2005)

7. How the EU's Lisbon Treaty Affects US National Security (Paul Rosenzweig, in Backgrounder No. 2390, March 2010)

8. Transatlantic Security in the 21st Century: Do New Threats Require New Approaches? (TESTIMONY, Sally McNamara at Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States House of Representatives. Wednesday, March 17, 2010)

9. Laying Down Clear Markers: Protecting American Interests from a Confusing European Constitution (John Hulsman, in Backgrounder No. 1712, Dec. 2003)

10. Europe: What Future? (Robin Harris, Heritage Foundation Special Report No. 81, July 2010)

Non-affiliated:

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Volker, Kurt. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs. Remarks at the Heritage Foundation Washington, DC (April 7, 2008).

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Transcript of Hearing Before The Subcommittee On European Affairs Of The Committee On Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session. On the subject of *The Effects Of The Madrid Terrorist Attacks On U.S.-European Cooperation In The War On Terrorism*. March 31, 2004.

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Transcript of Hearing Before The Committee On Foreign Relations United States Senate, One Hundred Tenth Congress Second Session On the subject of *NATO Enlargement and Effectiveness*, March 11, 2008.