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The Role of the Europeans in the Midst of the US-Iran Crisis in January 2020: the Dilemma of being a Normative Power in an Amoral World

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Abstract:
EU's foreign policy instruments have been mainly designed with a normative approach for contribution to stability and peace in a changing political landscape. However, EU foreign policy faces different challenges that constantly test its ability related to conflict resolution, international understanding, and the defence of its Interests, namely, the crisis between the US and Iran in January 2020. This research is to answer the following question: What were the failures of the EU's foreign policy in the middle of the crisis between the US and Iran in January 2020? This paper aims to determine the shortcoming of the EU foreign policy affecting its role as a Global Power during the US-Iran crisis in January 2020. Main objective is to determine the failures of the EU's foreign policy affecting its role as a Global Power in the middle of the crisis between the US and Iran in January 2020 and specific objectives are to summarize the role of the EU as a Global Power in the middle of conflicts, to identify the failure of the European foreign policy during the US-Iran crisis in January 2020 and to suggest a change in the EU foreign policy approach for improving Europeans' role in the international system.

Keywords: European Union, United States, Iran, Crisis, International Security

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) is the only integration process with a foreign and security policy designed to resolve conflicts and foster international understanding. In addition, its foreign policy relies on diplomacy and respect for international rules (European Union, 2022). However, this foreign policy has presented some failures in recent years. Thus, Europeans play a less transcendental role when they face some nationalist regimes such as Trump, Xi

Jin Ping or Putin's administration in the international arena. In January 2020, European foreign policy was tested through two events when the crisis between the United States and Iran started.

The first is connected to the assassination of Major General Qassim Soleimani, Iran's key man in the fight against terrorism and the Islamic State. As expected, the EU applied its soft power. However, this was not entirely effective when calling the international understanding. Subsequently, this crisis triggered an Iranian response and the conflict could worsen.

The second is related to Trump's pressure on Europeans to denounce a systematic violation of the 2015 nuclear agreement by Iran. This time, Europeans were also unable to counter the blackmail of the American president, and yielded to Trump's threat of accusing Iran of violating the JCPOA to avoid taxing European vehicles. In both situations, EU foreign policy needs a change of approach to face the challenges of the international system.

I) The role of the EU as a Global Power in the middle of conflicts

The EU's ability as a global player to resolve conflicts, promote international understanding and defend European interest has failed, despite having a regulatory framework with the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. European Soft Power has faced situations that need much more deterrent power than just relying on the goodwill of other political actors. This problem has been questioned even before the signing of the Maastricht treaty in 1992.

For example, the European role in the framework of the Yugoslav conflict at the end of the Cold War in 1991 required greater deterrent power, demonstrating its qualities as a global actor. The reality was very different regardless of the efforts made. In a few words, the conflict could not be avoided with unfortunate consequences, limiting Europe only to contemplate the failure of its strategy to bring peace to the Balkans. "The war in the former Yugoslavia was a test of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) provided for by the Treaty on European Union. It also highlighted the inadequacies of an independent military capability, whereas it was the European Union that provided most of the humanitarian aid" (CVCE, 2016).

Afterward, the EU became a unique integration process that has adopted a foreign policy. The core of the EU's foreign policy is based on its Second Pillar[1] and positivized in the TITLE V – "Provisions on a common foreign and security policy" of the Maastricht Treaty 1992, which underlines that the Union and its Member States shall define and implement a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (CVCE, 2002)". Since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the European Union is not merely an integration process any longer; it is a relevant actor in the international system.

On the other hand, Europeans streamlined the decision-making process in several steps. For example, the Treaty of Amsterdam introduced constructive abstention and qualified majority voting (QMV) in 1997. Subsequently, they

[1]The three Pillars are three distinct forms of co-operation between EU member states between 1993 and 2009.

established the High Representative's role for the CFSP in 1999. The Treaty of Nice 2001 mandated the Political and Security Committee (PSC) to exercise political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations in 2003 (Malovec & Padurariu, 2021).

Though, this new empowerment of the CFSP would have its litmus test after the 9/11 attacks that strengthened the unilateralism of the Bush foreign policy. The US decision to attack the Taliban in Afghanistan in October 2001 and the military intervention in Iraq in March 2003 dragged the Europeans to a new war. Later, Europeans faced a new post-structuralist security threat, such as Islamic terrorism. The 11 September reinforced the idea that national and external security are strictly linked. Thus, the EU response is a test to harmonize actions in the three pillars, which are now interconnected. Indeed, the fight against terrorism is not only externally. It also occurs within the territory of the EU through a policy against the financing of terrorism (Den Boer & Monar, 2002).

Under the excuse that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction, the Europeans could not do anything to prevent the American invasion of Iraq. Thus, they only limited themselves to supporting the American army under the doctrine of Preventive War, being able to avoid this unnecessary incursion with disastrous consequences for the region. In January 2003, the transatlantic alliance became seriously troubled. Javier Solana, EU's high representative, underlined the consequences of Washington's attitude "Differences in perception and ability contain the seeds of a potential transatlantic rift". "On the other side of the Atlantic, a source close to the Bush administration said: "Some people with the best intentions suggest a second UN resolution or something else. I think they are just empowering Saddam Hussein and their intransigence will make a peaceful solution impossible" (González Harbourbosco & Esteruelas, 2003). Europeans finally succumbed to American will for war. It definitively changed the panorama in the Middle East. This situation aimed to radicalize some members of Saddam Hussein's Army. Most of them would join the Islamic State. The post-war chaos allowed the expansion of terrorist groups, material and human losses, and a systematic violation of human rights in Iraq.

While the Lisbon Treaty 2007 improved the dynamism of the EU foreign policy and, more generally, the influence of the EU in international relations. However, EU foreign policy has faced the growing Russian nationalism and expansionism since this nation decided to support the pro-Russian militias in Georgia in 2008.

Later, it would use the same strategy vis-a-vis Ukraine through support for pro-Russian militias in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. " To depress an EU diplomat, layout a map of Europe. On one border is Russia, posing a physical threat to the Eastern Block and a digital one to the rest of the world. A coherent foreign policy in such circumstances would make sense. Instead, the EU has a contradictory one. Russia is an existential threat by the likes of Poland but a potential ally by France..... In Libya, perhaps the apogee of EU foreign policy bungling, member states managed to find themselves on different sides of a civil war. While, both Russia and Turkey carved out a foothold on the EU southern underbelly" (The Economist, 2020). These historical facts show that the EU foreign policy is losing dynamism and do not allow the EU to consolidate itself as a global power. Perhaps,

the scope of the EU foreign policy becomes limited against the influence of other actors in the international arena.

II) The failures of the European foreign policy during the US-Iran crisis in January 2020

The EU is defined as a Non-State Actor (NSA) or International Actor (IA) by IR Scholars (Richard & Van Hamme, 2013). Franck Petitville considers that "there are three ways to analyse the evolution of the EU foreign policy since the creation of European Political Cooperation (EPC) in 1970. The first approach consists of attributing to the successive institutional changes of the external action mechanism of the EU on its foreign policy. The second is to approach the EU as an emerging international player supported by large conceptual creativity intended to qualify the atypical nature of European "power" (Normative Power, Soft Power, etc.). The third is concerned with the content of the EU's foreign policy and its effects on the international order (Petiteville, 2011).

Hence, to demonstrate the shortcomings of the EU's foreign policy during the standoff between the Americans and the Iranians in January 2020, this analysis will apply the second approach above mentioned. The EU foreign policy depends on a normative approach focusing on the moral behaviour of international actors, not necessarily as a state. Natalie Tocci defines "normative" as being strongly based on international law and institutions, and thus the most universalizable basis upon which to assess foreign policy" (Tocci, 2007).

Failure to resolve conflicts and call for the International Understanding

In January 2020, the American president Donald Trump killed Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani, a top-ranked member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It was through a drone attack that the United States assassinated Soleimani and other members of the Iraqi Shia Militia Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)[2]. Trump argued that this was retaliation due to two reasons. First, the death of an Iraqi contractor in a rocket attack on an airbase near Kirkuk, Iraq, where targeted the US service members and civilian contractors. Second, the attack on the American embassy in Iraq in December 2019 (Sadjadpour, 2020). American president also menaced to bomb Iran's cultural sites (Paris, 2020).

After the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, the conflict between the United States and Iran heightened; and the International Community could face a conflagration on a global scale. On 8 January 2020, Iran launched the military operation codenamed "Martyr Soleimani", which consisted of a missile attack on US military bases in Iraq. The same day by mistake, Iran shot down the Flight 752 of Ukraine International Airlines. The day after, President Trump called on Iranian people and leaders, "We want you to have a future and a great future — one that you deserve, one of prosperity at home, and harmony with the nations of the world. The United States is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it" (White House, 2020).

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[2](Hashd al shaabi), Also known as the People's Mobilization Committee (PMC) and the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)

Concerning the European foreign policy during the US-Iran tensions in January 2020, after the special College meeting on 8 January 2020, the president of the EU's commission stated that "The current crisis deeply affects not only the region but all of us. And the use of weapons must stop now to give space to dialogue" (European Commission, 2020). Chris Brown argues that moral judgments and ethical considerations prevail in a normative international relations theory. Thus, the responsibilities and obligations of the State to others and the strong and prevalent aspects of international politics are part of this theory (Brown, 1992). In short, the EU was on the right path by invoking both parties to resolve the conflict under international law since this situation could affect European interests.

Two days later, EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell said that "Ministers have given me a strong mandate to carry out diplomatic efforts with all parties to contribute to de-escalation in the region, support political dialogue and promote a political regional solution" (European Council, 2020). The mandate of Josep Borrell to activate the diplomatic mechanisms failed, and Europeans could not ease the conflict.

In a Joint statement, President Macron, Chancellor Merkel and Prime minister Johnson invoked both actors to end hostilities. "There is now an urgent need for de-escalation. We call on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and responsibility. The current cycle of violence in Iraq must be stopped" (Elysee, 2020). Natalie Tocci states "...by a normative foreign policy we mean pursuing normative goals through normatively deployed instruments and having a discernible normative impact" (Tocci et al., 2008). However, all the calls were in vain since the efforts made did not allow the actors involved in this crisis to dialogue.

However, the US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, was disappointed with the European reaction to the US killing of the Iranian general Qassem Suleimani. He emphasised that Europeans were not sufficiently supportive: "Frankly, the Europeans haven't been as helpful as I wish that they could be. The Brits, the French, the Germans all need to understand that what we did, what the Americans did, saved lives in Europe as well" (Borger, 2020). Kenneth Thompson claims for the necessity of ethics and morality in international relations "decisions in foreign policy seldom involve simple and tidy choices. Actions stem from on-balance judgments. What is usually called for is an evaluation of the elements involved in a decision and the consequences likely to flow from each alternative course of action. In choices that are made, the best may be the enemy of the good. Not absolute truth but practical morality must be the guide" (Thompson, 1967).

Fortunately, the EU remained firm and did not give in to pressure from the Trump administration as Mike Pompeo wanted. It was possible thanks to the ethics and morality on which European foreign policy is based. The foreign policy scholar Joseph Nye author of the book "Do Moral Matter", states that "Good moral reasoning should be three-dimensional, weighing and balancing intentions, consequences, and means. A foreign policy should be judged accordingly. Moreover, a moral foreign policy must consider consequences such as maintaining an institutional order that encourages moral interests, in addition to newsworthy actions such as helping a dissident or a persecuted group in another country. And it is

important to include the ethical consequences of "non actions" (Nye, Why Morals Matter in Foreign Policy, 2020).

EU foreign policy following its normative basis during the conflict between the United States and Iran, its role as mediator did not ease the tension between both actors. Fortunately, it was gradually diminishing due to the rational attitude of both actors but not thanks to the European Soft Power. The EU foreign policy is functional and driven by ethics and morality. In addition, it seeks to promote respect for international law. However, the EU mediation is limited when it invites a global or regional power to dialogue. In this crisis, Americans and Iranians completely ignored the EU invocations to ease the conflict.

Inability to counter the pressure of a Global Power

Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Europeans and Iranians have always had an up-and-down relationship. The tension increased in September 1992, when the Affaire Mykonos took place. Both Europeans and Iranians kept a "critical dialogue", suspended after hearing the verdict of this trial when the Iranian State was found guilty of the murder of Kurdish opponents in April 1997 (Cowell, 1997). From that moment, part of the EU's principal claims towards Iran consisted of human rights and non-proliferation issues. After signing the JCPOA in July 2015, the interactions between the EU and Iran had considerably improved until the United States left the nuclear agreement in May 2018.

In January 2020, The Washington Post revealed that "Europeans acted on Iran deal after the United States threat on Tariff". The Trump administration threatened to impose a 25 per cent tariff on European automobile imports if the United Kingdom, France, and Germany did not formally accuse Iran of violating the JCPOA (Hudson & Souad, 2020)". Helene Sjursen states that "the normative basis of a State's foreign and security policy is conventionally linked to the idea that it defends the collective interests of a community of fate. The ultimate purpose and legitimacy basis of foreign and security policy is to defend this community and its values – to protect the national interest (Sjursen, Doing Good in the World? Reconsidering the Basis of the Research Agenda on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, 2007).

"The U.S. effort to coerce European foreign policy through tariffs, a move one European official equated to "extortion," represents a new level of hardball tactics with the United States' oldest allies, underscoring the extraordinary tumult in the transatlantic relationship" (Hudson & Souad, 2020). However, in this specific case, it prevailed the pressure and blackmail of president Trump on Europeans to tacitly denounce the violations of the 2015 nuclear agreement by Iran.

Finally, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany would formally allege Iran of violating the deal on January 14, 2020. "However, in the meantime Iran has continued to break key restrictions set out in the JCPOA. Iran's actions are inconsistent with the provisions of the nuclear agreement and have increasingly severe and non-reversible proliferation implications" (Federal Foreign Office, 2020)n. Therefore, it would be easier to activate the mechanism of the United Nations sanctions on Iran.

Nevertheless, this would not be something new. Since the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal in May 2018, the sanctions imposed by the Trump administration have kept

European investments off Iran. French journalist expert in Geopolitics, Pierre Haski affirms that "the Europeans could not oppose the American extraterritorial sanctions, applying to any European company which trades with Iran. Result: Total, Renault, Air France and, many others immediately left Iran" (Haski, 2020).

The crisis US-Iran in January 2020 tested the scope of the EU's foreign policy because of the failure of the EU to resolve conflicts and call for International Understanding after the assassination of Major General Qassim Soleimani. And the EU Inability to counter the pressure of a Global Power when Trump's administration asked Europeans to act on the Iran deal after the US's threat on Tariff. Therefore, it has implied that the US does not tax European vehicles in exchange for formally accusing Iran of violating the JCPOA. After analysing these two problems, the question that arises is what happened with the ability of the EU foreign policy to resolve conflicts, to call for international understanding and to counter the American pressure?

EU's normative approach focuses on the idealism of international relations, which assumes a moral role to build peace in the International System. Thus, the EU foreign policy becomes too weak to face the challenges of this XXI century. However, not many powers adopt this position in the international arena. Others can act in the opposite way to challenge the international order, limiting the scope of the EU foreign policy. In a few words, the normative approach of the EU's foreign policy collides with the realistic and amoral vision of some states in the international arena, especially those of nationalist regards such as the American administration of Trump or the Russian administration of Putin.

The EU as a global actor needs to build an approach of foreign policy based on empowering the economy and security. It will contribute to resolving conflicts, fostering international understanding and defending their interest in the international arena.

III) Toward a change in the approach of the EU's foreign policy: Strengthening Economy and Security

Kenneth Waltz is one of the founders of the Neorealist approach in international relations that discusses the Anarchic Structures and Balance of Power in his book titled "Theory of International Politics" (1979). He affirms that "Structures cause actions to have consequences they were not intended to have. Surely most of the actors will notice that, and at least some of them will be able to figure out why. They may develop a pretty good sense of just how structures work their effects" (Waltz, 1979). In this sense, the EU must focus on the consequences of these actions and reformulate its foreign policy. For example, a possible alliance between China and Russia would affect European interests. The competition for the hegemon of global powers poses a real threat, not only to European interests but also to world peace. Thus, international relations specialists are continuously questioning the role of the EU and the scope of the EU's foreign policy in the international arena, especially after the Lisbon Treaty 2007.

European Policy Makers must consider the qualitative aspect of the international system, such as anarchy and amorality where the EU interacts with other State Actors (SA) and Non-State Actors (NSA). Based on this argument, they should rethink the content and determinants of the EU's foreign policy. Precisely, after the "BREXIT "

The EU needs to clarify its role in the international system in the short, medium and long term. If the EU wants to be a key player, the EU will need to counteract the undesirable effects of the structures. It means reinforcing its economy to better contribute to development projects that avoid conflicts. On the other hand, the EU must strengthen its security and defence policies through alliances or even think about a European army. It is clear that just focusing on soft power does not enough to tackle the challenges of this century.

Strengthening and Diversifying EU's economy

US and China reached US$20.894 and US$14.723 trillion in 2020 (The World Bank, 2022). Both countries are top world economies, but what is wrong with the EU's economy? The EU's GDP is estimated to be US$15.292 trillion in 2020 (The World Bank, 2022). Notwithstanding, Brexit's consequences could partially trouble the EU's economy. The EU lost the second economy most important in Europe, with a GDP estimated to be 2.764 trillion in 2020 (The World Bank, 2022). Besides, the EU lost a net contribution from the UK estimated to be US$19.48 Billion in 2019 (House of Commons Library, 2021).

Before considering a future enlargement of the EU, it is mandatory to look for Economic growth. It will be impossible to make the EU a great power again if this integration process has no solid economic support to achieve this goal. First, the EU must prioritize economic growth through an appropriate monetary and fiscal policy and delay the enlargement of members. In contrast, a strengthened economy is synonymous with a strong currency, considering the Euro has lost dynamism in the last decade. The members of the Eurozone are 19 but remain seven states on the enlargement agenda: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden, except Denmark. In this case, European policymakers must revitalize the Eurozone to recover the economic dynamism of the first decade of the XXI century.

Another aspect to consider is its trade dependence. "In 2020, China took over the position as the EU's main trading partner in goods from the US, with an overall share of 16.1% compared with 15.2% for the US. Since the UK left the EU, it has become the EU's third trade partner for goods, accounting for 12.2% of all trade in goods. As regards trade in services, the US is the EU's main trading partner, followed by the UK and Switzerland" (European Parliament, 2021). In this context, Europeans should diversify trade and investment by looking at developing countries or regions, such as Latin America and Indo-Pacific. It is the only way to create economic structures that would empower the EU in the international system.

Rethinking the Common Defence and Security Policy

Helene Sjursen suggests that "the EU foreign and security policy is closely linked to the conception of problem-solving. One of the characteristics of its policy is an effort to strengthen those dimensions of the international system that help to constraint power politics" (Sjursen, 2006). In this sense, the EU should focus on countering the hybrid threats, given that Soft Power based on a normative approach is not enough to face this kind of menaces.

Besides, Joseph Nye emphasizes that "……it is just as important to set the agenda and structure the situations in world politics as it is to

get others to change in particular situations. This aspect of power that is, getting others to want what you want might be called indirect or co-operative power behaviour" (Nye, 1991). And to get others to change in particular situations, it is necessary to design a more strategic foreign policy, which could imply that the EU can count on its army.

Conclusion

Since Donald Trump took office in January 2017, he saw Europe as an opponent to modify global geopolitics at will. In addition, Trump believed that the best way to make it possible was through menacing or blaming Europeans, which yielded to his demands in some cases.

This last means that something wrong is happening with the EU foreign policy that could not counter Trump's manipulation. When the crisis started between the US and Iran in January 2020, the EU had a poor mediation trying to call both actors to calm down. The EU just acted as a mere spectator due to its foreign policy. At this moment, its normative approach was not strong enough to avoid a confrontation between both actors.

After analysing the role of the EU in the middle of the US-Iran crisis in January 2020, the findings of this research lead to two problems affecting its foreign policy. On the one hand, the failure to resolve conflicts and the call for International Understanding. On the other hand, the inability to counter the pressure of a Global Power. Thus, it is necessary to apply a more pragmatic approach that reinforces the European role in the international system. As a result, Europeans could improve their ability of mediation. They also could counter the influence of a Global Power.

EU policymakers should consider that Soft Power based on a normative approach is not enough when the EU faces an anarchical and amoral game in the international arena. Presidents such as Donald Trump, Xi Jin Ping or Vladimir Putin compete for hegemony under a realist approach. Europeans should reshape their foreign policy turning to the neorealism of international relations by focusing on empowering the economy and security. With a new approach to the EU's foreign policy, the International System would enjoy a solid multipolar structure, bring stability and preserve peace. It also would pave the way for better cooperation through multilateralism, a fundamental characteristic of the EU.

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