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The relevance of civilian power?

Introduction

As a 'label' civilian power (CP) in relation to academic discourse on the EC enjoyed a reasonable status during the 1970s. Developed within the burgeoning debate over the crumbling of post-1945 US economic leadership, rising and complex interdependence characterised by the presence of different forms of 'power' exerted by a variety of 'actors', and the onset of detente within Europe, CP was a reference point for distinct interpretations of change, and the use of power, within the international system.

Whilst academic debate over the utility of CP was not wholly confined to the interpretations of Francois Duchene and Hedley Bull, the work of these writers set the terms of the debate.

Duchene's focus was upon the future role and behaviour of the EC within the international system. Noting that although by the early 1970s the rigid characteristics of the Cold War were undergoing some change, the 'uncertainties of interdependence' continued to hinge upon the propensity for conflict and cooperation. Because of this continuity he argued that the historical *raison d'etre* and learning curve of the integration process were essential in the shaping of the international system. However he suggested that it was neither feasible nor desirable that the EC, in the conduct of its external affairs, be blessed with both the capabilities (means of coercion) and intentions (political and strategic will) of the superpowers.

It was unfeasible given the discrepancy of EC member state perceptions of their world role together with the lack of consensus and legitimacy over the EC's acquisition of the traditional instruments of power, and undesirable given the increasing importance of economic or 'soft' power and the level of interdependence between the EC and other units in the international system.

Instead he suggested that ... "the EC's interest as a civilian group of countries long on economic power and relatively short on armed force is as far as possible to domesticate relations between states ... this means trying to bring to international problems the sense of common responsibility and structures of contractual politics which have in the past been associated almost exclusively with 'home' and not foreign ... affairs" (Duchene 1973:19-20).

Whilst there are overtly normative considerations in his analysis Duchene was generally concerned with identifying the changing source and use(s) of power and proposing what he felt to be the most likely course of action for the EC - the explicit pursuit of consensual means and 'civilising' values.

Writing nearly a decade later, Hedley Bull found much to say on Duchene's notion of CP and by definition on the nature, possession and use of power by [primarily state] actors. Critical of developments in international political theory during the 1970s, which he labelled as 'neo-idealist or neo-progressivist' he posited that "... the power or influence exerted by the EC and other such civilian actors was conditional upon a strategic environment provided by the military power of states, which they did not control" (Bull 1982:151).

For Bull interpretation of the notion of CP was relatively simple: it did not rest upon overtly normative or prescriptive foundations, but instead was merely a reflection of systemic constraints upon the autonomy of Western Europe. Bipolarity and the centrality of Europe to the balance of 'super' power inescapably led, at best, to a limited and partial room for manoeuvre.

Bull's focus was in any case less upon the EC per se than upon the requirements of the international system. Europe's place was best-served by attempting to upgrade its self-sufficiency in defence and security issues, as its 'place' was progressively undermined by a growing divergence of interests in relation to the USA, by the continued threat from the USSR, and from the domestic political malaise fostered by security dependency.

Predictably he emphasized the existence of a concert of Western European states "... whose basis is an area of perceived common interests among the major powers" (ibid:163) and his thoughts on the role of the EC provide a useful comparison with Duchene "... there is no supranational community in Western Europe but only a group of nation-states... if there were a supranational authority in Western Europe, this would be a source of weakness in defence policy rather than of strength; it is the nation-states ... their capacity to inspire loyalty and to make war that are the sources of its power" (ibid: 163).

Bull's fundamental point, in relation to Duchene, was straightforward: the use of military force remained a constant feature of world politics, dependency upon US military guarantees led to an unhealthy vulnerability for European security, and such vulnerability should be eradicated by the creation of a "Western European military alliance" closely related to the EC "... as the organisation with the strongest claims to embody the ideas of European unity, it would provide a much-needed element of cement" (ibid:164).

Both writers were promoting descriptions of the EC, or Europe, 'as it was', albeit from differing periods of world politics and on the basis of different assumptions. The underlying messages to be drawn from their work may remain valid in the current debate on integration and security in Europe.

Bull's implicit message that civilian power = non-military power implied therefore that 'actorness' was assured by the possession of military means. For example, "...a civilian actor, according to Twitchett, has no military dimension but

is able to influence states, global and regional organizations... through diplomacy, economic resources and legal consideration" (Ginsberg 1989:1).

Whilst this entire issue has been partially overtaken by recent events, most notably in the response of the Union Treaty with regard to a common foreign, security and ultimately defence policy, the creation of legal texts and upgrading institutional capacities will not and can not preempt some degree of internal political and social consensus as to the objectives, norms and instruments of external activity. Largely for this reason Duchene's message concerning the 'ends' as well as 'means' of EC foreign policy remains pertinent.

Whilst his explication of the CP concept has been understood as an attempt to rationalise the 'limitations' of the EC as an actor in the international system, the element of prescription - that the EC should, virtually irrespective of any systemic constraints, value its civilian power role - clearly attracted much criticism.

The strengths of the CP approach, it is argued, are based upon Duchene's consensual and contractual style of diplomacy; "... the acceptance of the necessity for cooperation with others in the pursuit of international objectives ... the concentration on non-military, primarily economic, means to secure national goals ... and a willingness to develop supranational structures to address critical issues of international management" (Maull 1990:92-93); and "... the intellectual impact of a new model of interstate relations, the disposition of considerable economic influence over the management of the international economy, the possession of a vast network of contacts and agreements with every region of the international system - are those most capable of influencing the very environment which determines whether or not military strength will need to be used" (Hill 1990:43).

The relevance of 'civilian power'?

As the introduction has shown, the historical context in which Duchene and Bull discussed the place of EC Europe within the workings of the international system was crucial. It could be argued that both writers were products of the period in which they were writing - complex or asymmetric interdependence and the burgeoning multipolarity of the early 1970s, and the 'second Cold War' return to power politics which reinforced Bull's realist approach.

As a result of developments within the international system during the 1970s and 1980s, the civilian power concept was both attacked and discredited; "... internal and external events have rendered the 'civilian' or 'security' dilemma obsolete ... the Twelve will have to use their economic clout prudently and with circumspection ... they will be compelled to do more for their own security" (Tsakaloyannis 1989:253).

If the concept of civilian power is defined by the absence of or strict constitutional limits upon the possession and use of force then clearly the concept is redundant or 'obsolete', given the Treaty on European Union's commitment to developing a common defence policy reinforced by increasing convergence of EC-EPC and EC-security activity during the 1980s.

However, whilst the 'label' of civilian power may be eroded with the EC/Union's future possession of coercive means, it is argued here that the 'ends' of civilian power constitute a starting point for thinking about how and why the Community will pursue its foreign and security policy objectives, particularly within the 'new Europe'.

The relevance or irrelevance of CP is highlighted in relation to several considerations:

1. As a description of what the integration process has achieved.

Most, if not all, commentators would hardly dispute the claim that within the EC a substantial 'domestication' of formerly international behaviour has occurred. Divergence and conflicts of interests necessarily characterise the EC polity, but the linkage bargaining and compromise involving state and non-state actors sustains a broadly workable consensus - instead of waging war on each other we now dispute fisheries' quotas and business relocation decisions.

CP, in terms of its application to the process of integration, merely confirms the successful creation of a security community a la Deutsch, and the Monnet method of pooling and binding together the common interests of national elites.

So what? The scholarly study of the EC hardly requires any further 'labels' to capture the essential nature of the integrated polity. To be fair to Duchene, CP as a label was not aimed at intra-EC relations but was applied to the foreign policy actions of the Community. However, for the EC to exercise CP outside its borders, clearly the resolution of historic insecurities, the promotion of collective as opposed to partial interests and the reliance of the integration process upon stable commercial and political relations were necessary assumptions.

The point made here is a general one: any exercise of power in any political system, be it 'civilian' or otherwise, is usually based upon both values and machinery designed to define and advance those interests in whose defence power is exercised. The concept of CP, it could be suggested, did not clarify both the 'automaticity' of Community expression of CP values nor the degree of transparency, accountability and legitimacy accorded to the policy-making process.

In short, the exercise of liberal "social values of equality, justice and toleration" (Duchene 1973:20) does not rest easily with alternative assessments of Community external interests - apart from radical critiques of EC commercial and development policy (Galtung 1973; Ravenhill 1985) the CP approach did not satisfactorily account for the element of self-interest and self-preservation in EC external relations, nor could it reconcile the potential for CP 'means' to escalate conflict (through for example the use of sanctions) and any inherent limitations upon an exclusive reliance upon 'civilian power'.

Similarly, the exercise of power requires a coherent and cohesive political system to elucidate and legitimate the expression of power. The notion of CP could thus consider the degree to which the EC as a political system requires further 'domestication'. This is not a new issue - during the 1980s the problem of how to present the EC with a 'human face' increased in saliency - and given the exacerbation of the ECs 'legitimacy gap' since Duchene's period of reference and the volatile 'permissive consensus' presently afflicting the development of the Union, any exercise of power can only be sanctioned through a more accountable and transparent decision making process. Allusion to the internal contradictions and needs of those involved in the process of integration has been made effectively elsewhere; "if society is eroded from within by a decline in responsible citizenship, indifference to others and social tensions, how can individuals be expected to defend its security, let alone accept that their country should take risks to share international responsibilities with others?" (Delors 1991:101-102).

From the 'constitutionalist' point of view, long in favour of promoting the EP as counterweight to executive power, the CP approach (and any alternatives) would be lacking in its attention to issues of internal credibility, legitimacy and authority - even if CP values were seen to be 'common', they were certainly not subject to 'common' definition and acceptance.

The utility of CP as a label to describe not merely the de-legitimisation of force between member states but also the expression of domestic values is therefore hampered by the 'democratic deficit' and the extent to which foreign policy is not subject to a broad consensus on values and norms to be upheld.

2. As an expression of the Community's external identity.

The CP approach emphasising a responsible and effective exercise of Community power and influence was perceived, at least by Bull, as an untenable attempt to rationalise the fundamental limitations of the EC as an actor in the international system, given both structural and domestic

constraints upon the integration of [military] security and defence activities within the framework of the EC.

Duchene argued however that CP was "much more than the common prudence which makes the most of assets and casts a veil over weakness. It involves the psychological roots of any foreseeable West European political system" (Duchene 1973:20).

This contestation of what constitutes 'actorness' has obviously been overtaken by events: during the 1980s there was a growing, albeit partial, convergence of EC-security and EC-EPC activity (Tsakaloyannis 1989) and in the post-Cold War period, the civilian EC was criticised for its inadequacies and encouraged to develop a stronger global role (Delors 1991; Poulon and Bourantonis 1992; Brenner 1992).

An exclusive reliance upon a CP identity moreover rests uneasily with the fundamental dynamic of recent community development: the re-ordering of goals in order to strengthen the 'capability' of the EC as an international actor, capability extending across political, commercial, technological and military interests. Moreover, those re-ordered goals have also to be accepted as binding commitments by those states presently pursuing EC membership applications. In terms of systemic change and its 'European' consequences, the CP or 'business as usual' approach is therefore largely redundant, as the sole expression of Community external identity.

'Security' concerns, spanning political, economic, environmental and traditional military dimensions, now appear to be a major dynamic of post-Cold War global politics. This is true of the new Europe, and the ECs security role and functioning within it: whilst CP is not wholly redundant (as will be suggested next) it cannot address all the security concerns of the EC, obviously in the military-defence field, and may not be of sufficient 'weight' to bind together the political Community/Union in future years.

Conventional approaches to the study of IR maintain a role for the legitimate threat of and/or recourse to military force to achieve certain goals, and ultimately self-protection or self-defence are such legitimate grounds. Such a perspective stresses that CP as the sole expression of Community interests is tenable within the liberal developed western club, but conditions within and between other regions may militate against sole reliance upon CP - the economic 'carrot and stick' approach lacking a strong and credible 'stick' can be rejected, and in any case such an approach requires a clear hierarchy of interests backed by a guarantee or 'insurance policy', namely coercive power.

From this perspective civilian 'means' and 'ends' are only effective under specific conditions; where the primacy of economic-welfare issues and the incentives to employ civilian 'means' far outweigh the costs of failing to observe international norms of behaviour, and where the EC may sustain a 'new and improved' world role among fellow members of the club. Critics of CP clearly have a strong case for arguing that values and interests cannot rest in all cases upon good-will or self-restraint - the economic 'carrot and stick' approach does have a limited shelf-life. Experience of the war in the former Yugoslavia amply demonstrates the limitations of 'civilian' means in a situation where protagonists place less value on the non-use of force or upon the observance of status-quo commitments to order stability and peaceful change. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, cynics might have good reason to doubt whether in fact even a 'military EC' would have responded to the crisis, given the profound inability of Western leadership to intervene both politically and militarily.

3. As an approach to the management of European security.

It is suggested here that the fundamental conditions of, and requisites for, European security in the post-Cold War environment entirely vindicate the merits of civilian power.

The EFTAs, the countries of the Mediterranean basin, and former Warsaw Pact/Soviet States have all, to varying degrees, been in receipt of the Community's stress upon the normalisation and stabilisation of political relations, identification of mutual and reciprocal interests, and specific programmes fostering access to EC markets, economic and technological assistance, formal and contractual dialogue and cooperation on social, cultural and environmental issues. Such CP 'means' pursued within a regional as well as a global context have enabled the EC, by seeking to create and sustain zones of cooperation and relative stability, to shape long-term patterns of world politics - for some groups in particular such an approach may have aided a sense of inclusion in the management of the international system.

The benefits of the CP approach are rooted in the Community's ability, on a political and economic basis, to inculcate and sustain a broad commitment to order and stability in Europe, in addition to helping to create conditions ill-suited to the threat or use of force within those societies.

The CP approach in this context of managing European 'insecurity' is consonant with [currently] fashionable expectations of the EC as an agent for the democratization of Central and Eastern Europe, as a 'force for peace' and as a magnetic pole of attraction. However the immense long-term political and economic effort required of the EC to ensure 'democracy by

convergence' (Larrabee 1992:160) raises serious questions over the level and direction of Community expenditure, and generally over the efficacy of coordinated Western policy.

In general the convergence between the fundamental requirements of European security and the ECs incentives to respond with 'civilian' means does vindicate the continuation of CP as a management tool, but the 'fit' is by no means assured - the scenario of the "triumph of anarchy" (Buzan et al 1990:175-176) cannot be ruled out. As a result CP cannot single handedly either secure or defend the ECs external interests. Nonetheless the strengths of a CP approach should be highlighted, especially for its ability to 'shape' the international system through long term low-level and stable policy. Whilst the EC/Union is moving in the direction of assuming state-like instruments of power this does not necessarily detract from the way in which civilian 'means' have built up a sound network of global relations. This learning curve providing the basis for EC foreign policy actions remains valid as "... the European Union will remain for a long time more a civilian than a military actor, and will address complex crises involving both dimensions. While the civilianisation of international relations is a long term objective of the European Union, the legitimate use of force remains an essential element in any civilian society" (RIIA 1992:99). In summary, the label 'civilian power EC' is obsolete given that sole reliance upon the means of CP have been supplemented by a commitment to the future acquisition of coercive means.

However, CP instruments and 'ends' may be important, notwithstanding the residual power of military force and disinclination of actors to pursue goals in a non-belligerent fashion, for stabilising organising devices such as states, institutions and legal norms, and for reinforcing the potential for order and stability across Europe. The 'bandwagoning' approach (Hoffman 1992:197) of the EC in its 'civilian' external relations is a crucial element in shaping the European security milieu, and in this context, the contribution of CP can be seen less as an overt normative preference of EC members and more as genuine possibly enlightened self-interest in defending their political and economic security.

Conclusions

Since substantive concerns of European 'insecurity', for the foreseeable future, revolve around economic and political reconstruction, social and environmental renewal and accommodation within the international system, the general convergence between the security interests of the EC and weak states in Europe appears to vindicate the continued relevance of civilian 'means' and Duchene's hope that a more integrated

cohesive Community would emerge to share the responsibilities of power in the management of global affairs.

Nonetheless the exercise of 'civilian' power does raise problems for the EC, contrary to the view that "the Community has simply made a virtue out of necessity in seeking to engineer negotiated solutions" (Hill 1990:44). In exercising 'civilian' power, never mind military power, the issue of conditionality cannot be avoided: policy does not stop at the door of domestic regimes and since the pursuit of civilian 'ends' involves 'interference', the Community requires a more efficient and cohesive policy-making process whereby incentives and disincentives (punishments) can be more vigorously defined, and where competing institutional interests can be reconciled (Delors 1991, Brenner 1992).

Whilst the concept of CP may appeal to our philosophical and ethical reasoning, the successful application of 'means' to 'ends' is as problematic for the EC as any other employment of means: in this context CP is seen not necessarily as a 'soft option' to avoid 'real' issues of power, but which forms the backbone for the values and instruments of EC foreign and security policies.

Above all, for the exercise of CP to result in optimal outcomes for the EC, we return to Duchene's hope that a progressive 'domestication' of interstate relations would erode the existence of the 'security dilemma' and the primacy of military power as a determinant of 'actorness'. This is perhaps of more relevance at the present time, given contemporary thoughts on the 'end of history', globalization and the spread of civil society, although one writer has warned against the assumptions of universal liberalism - 'war between advanced industrial liberal democracies is unthinkable not because they are liberal democracies but because they are advanced and industrial and therefore, probably by definition, have political systems that meet the minimum standards of rationality required to preclude war as an instrument of policy among themselves' (Brown 1992:327).

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