



European Public Opinion and the Use of Force

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Abstract

This Technical Memorandum explores the relationship between public opinion in NATO-Europe and the use of military force. It examines the widely-held assumption that Europeans are, in principle, opposed to the use of military power as an instrument of foreign policy. By reviewing polling data from the time of the Kosovo War (1999) and the ongoing mission in Libya, the paper reveals that there is considerable support for such operations if they are regarded as legitimate. The fear of casualties (i.e., “the body-bag syndrome”) might also play a role, although the discussion is hypothetical given the minimal losses suffered by the Western Powers during the missions in Kosovo and, to date, in Libya.

Résumé

Ce document technique explore les liens entre l’opinion publique dans les pays européens membres de l’OTAN et le recours à la force militaire. Il examine la croyance fortement répandue selon laquelle les Européens s’opposent, en principe, à l’usage de la puissance militaire comme moyen d’application de la politique étrangère. Suite à l’examen des résultats de sondages effectués à l’époque de la guerre du Kosovo (1999) et de ceux qui ont été exécutés à l’égard de la mission actuellement en cours en Libye, le document révèle que ce genre d’opération bénéficie d’un appui considérable si elle jugée légitime. La crainte de subir des pertes (soit le « syndrome de la housse mortuaire ») pourrait également avoir un rôle à jouer, bien que cette question soit hypothétique étant donné les faibles pertes subies par les puissances occidentales pendant les missions menées au Kosovo et, à ce jour, en Libye.

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Executive summary

European Public Opinion and the Use of Force

**Ben Lombardi; DRDC CORA TM 2012-008; Defence R&D Canada – CORA;
January 2012.**

Introduction or background: This paper has two objectives. The first is to examine the general attitude in Europe toward expeditionary military (i.e., out-of-area) missions. The second is to probe more deeply the widely held assumption that European publics are less supportive of the use of military force than their American counterparts.

Results: Focussing on two comparable cases – Kosovo (1999) and the ongoing operation in Libya – permits a study of missions that are/have been of similar duration and defined by a similar purpose. With regard to Kosovo, the unexpected length of the mission and the widely-held view that the military campaign was proving itself ineffective does not seem to have had a negative impact on that public support. Instead, the avowed purpose of the mission – protecting civilians from the excesses of an authoritarian regime – was sufficient for the publics of most major European states to support it. Survey results clearly show that casualties are an issue of concern in moulding public opinion, but it is unclear to what degree. The discussion in the paper of casualties (i.e., “the body-bag syndrome”) is necessarily hypothetical. Neither the Kosovo War nor the current Libyan intervention has had to confront large numbers of military casualties. This leaves open the prospect that public support in Europe for “wars of choice” could nosedive – as was implied when, in 1999, pollsters asked about the use of ground forces -- should that ever happen. Nevertheless, polling suggests that the objective of providing humanitarian relief seems to provide some cushion of support for such operations.

Significance: The results of polling in both cases revealed high levels of public support for the Kosovo and Libyan operations on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, generally speaking, European publics, even those in countries not contributing forces, have tended to be more supportive of the current military intervention than that in the US. That finding does not, however, obviate the concern that Europeans are less inclined to support the use of armed force. Indeed, the polling results cited above seem to show that, conceptually, and when asked with regard to specific hypothetical examples (e.g., Iran) where force might be employed, European publics have a higher level of unease than does the American public. They are prepared on occasion to countenance its use, but Europeans much prefer non-violent and non-coercive approaches to conflict resolution.

Future plans: This report provides useful input for further research in support of Project 10aa21. Should additional survey findings on this subject become available, its conclusions will be re-examined.

Sommaire

European Public Opinion and the Use of Force

Ben Lombardi; DRDC CORA TM 2012-008; R & D pour la défense Canada – CARO; janvier 2012.

Introduction ou contexte : Le présent document vise deux objectifs. Le premier consiste à examiner l'opinion générale des Européens à l'égard des missions militaires expéditionnaires (c.-à-d. hors zone). Le second consiste à examiner plus en profondeur la croyance fortement répandue selon laquelle le public européen est moins en faveur du recours à la force militaire que le public américain.

Résultats : L'examen de deux cas comparables, soit la guerre du Kosovo (1999) et l'opération en cours en Libye, nous éclaire sur des missions de durée similaire et visant un objectif semblable. En ce qui a trait au Kosovo, la durée inattendue de la mission et le fait que bien des gens jugeaient la campagne militaire inefficace ne semblent pas avoir eu d'effet négatif sur l'appui du public. Au contraire, à lui seul, le but avoué de la mission (protéger les civils des excès d'un régime autoritaire) constituait pour la population de la plupart des pays d'Europe une raison suffisante pour l'appuyer. Les résultats des sondages démontrent clairement que la crainte des pertes humaines influe sur l'opinion publique, mais on ignore dans quelle mesure. Dans le document, la question des pertes humaines (c.-à-d. le syndrome de la housse mortuaire) n'est bien sûr abordée qu'à titre hypothétique. En effet, la guerre du Kosovo et l'intervention actuelle en Libye n'ont pas provoqué d'importantes pertes chez les militaires. Ce qui peut nous amener à penser que l'appui du public en Europe à l'égard des « guerres choisies » pourrait périlcliter si cela se produisait, comme l'ont laissé entendre les réponses à la question du sondage de 1999 concernant le recours aux forces terrestres. Néanmoins, le sondage révèle que le public semble favoriser ces opérations du fait qu'elles visent à prodiguer des secours humanitaires.

Importance : Dans les deux cas, les sondages ont démontré un fort appui de la part du public des deux côtés de l'Atlantique à l'égard des opérations au Kosovo et en Libye. En fait, d'une manière générale, le public européen, même dans les pays qui ne fournissent pas de forces, a tendance à appuyer davantage l'intervention militaire en cours que le public états-unien. En dépit de cette constatation, il n'en reste pas moins que les Européens sont moins enclins à appuyer le recours à la force armée. En effet, les résultats de sondage susmentionnés semblent indiquer que, du point de vue conceptuel, et lorsque la question porte sur des exemples hypothétiques précis (p. ex. l'Iran) où l'on pourrait avoir recours à la force, le public européen éprouve un plus grand malaise que le public américain. Ce dernier est prêt à tolérer à l'occasion l'usage de la force, alors que les Européens, quant à eux, préfèrent de beaucoup que la résolution de conflits se fasse par des approches non violentes et non coercitives.

Perspectives : Ce rapport contient des données qui seront utiles dans le cadre des recherches plus poussées qui seront faites à l'appui du projet 10aa21. Si d'autres résultats de sondage sur cette question s'avèrent disponibles, il faudra alors réexaminer les conclusions du rapport.

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1 Introduction

This paper looks at public opinion in Europe as it relates to the use of armed force as an instrument of foreign policy. In an oft-cited essay, former British diplomat Robert Cooper referred to post-Cold War Europe as “post-modern”, in which the traditional separation of domestic and foreign affairs was no longer present, and governments rejected the use of force as a policy instrument to resolve disputes. It was a way to distinguish between the predictable and non-violent political order that exists in the European Union (EU) from other less fortunate regions. It was also a useful distinction for with it he was trying to warn European leaders and thinkers that the world “out there” was not progressively moving toward their model and that they should not underestimate the consequences: ¹

while Europe is developing a new and more orderly security system, other parts of the world are becoming, if anything, more disorderly. It was perhaps natural that with one global order gone, statesmen should want to hail the arrival of a new world order.²

Whatever one might think of the trend line in the non-European sphere that Cooper presents in his essay, there is little to argue with his description of the European system. Over the nearly six decades since the Treaty of Rome (1953) was signed, European states have progressively stripped themselves of vast areas of sovereign authority and transferred it to multinational bodies, most especially what today we call the European Union (EU). Many of the frictions that so often in European history led to armed conflict are now subject to negotiations within the various offices in Brussels or, if already addressed, are managed by the EU’s many agencies. Foreign affairs and defence are, however, approached rather differently. There are also some areas where Brussels has been less successful in centralizing the direction of specific policy envelopes. Despite the recent creation by the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) of a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the question of employing armed force outside of the EU’s borders is still very much subject to the decision-making procedures and the perspectives of national governments. There are a number of reasons for this reluctance to extend the Union’s authority to embrace foreign and defence policies, including national prestige, residual distrust of others, differing national interests and ambitions. To these must be added the fact that many members of the EU are also member-states of the North Atlantic alliance and the longstanding dependence on the United States that began in the Cold War undoubtedly continues to act as a constraint in the era that has followed it.³ But whatever the reason, decisions about what were once termed “high politics” remain very much a national prerogative.

*I am grateful to two DRDC colleagues, Donald Neill and Stephane Lefebvre, and three external reviewers for reading and providing comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ Robert Cooper, *The Post Modern State and the Modern World* (Demos: London, 2000), p. 22. Cooper is said to have helped shape former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s “new internationalism”.

² *Ibid.* p.8.

³ Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Whitney make this argument: “Europe’s confused but essentially submissive approach to transatlantic relations frustrates Americans, but also sells their own interests short. The consequences are felt not just in direct transatlantic interaction, but also in how European governments deal, or fail to deal, with other international problems.” See *Toward a Post-America Europe: A Power Audit of EU-US Relations* (European Council on Foreign Relations: London, November 2009), p. 13.

The concept of the post-modern state that Cooper introduced is nonetheless useful for consideration of the role of the European Power in global affairs. In his essay, the EU (though not the US) is presented as the quintessential expression of his understanding of post-modernity, a supranational entity composed of post-modern states where the focus of political life was on guaranteeing the life and security of the individual:

The post-modern state is one that sets value above all on the individual. Hence its unwarlike character. War is essentially a collective activity: the struggles of the twentieth century have been the struggles of liberalism – the doctrine of the individual – against different forms of collectivism: class, nation, race, community, state.⁴

It is perhaps unsurprising that the author became a senior counsellor in the European External Action Service, the EU's equivalent of a foreign service, for it is clear that he regards the Union as a unique entity in world history. That said, there is nothing particularly novel about asserting a linkage between the nature of the state and a working peace system, for Immanuel Kant did much the same in his classic work, *Essay on Perpetual Peace*.⁵ And, to some degree, this same idea informs the view that democracies do not make war on one another.⁶ It is not within the scope of this paper to examine if Cooper's thesis is valid, although one can note that other writers have similarly argued that the EU's approach to international policy is pregnant with positive consequences for global affairs.⁷ For the purpose of this paper, however, what is most important is the implication that post-modern states might be inclined to approach international conflict in a less militarised fashion than those he termed modern states (e.g., the USA). And, therein lies an important, policy-relevant issue for the trans-Atlantic alliance: do European states, and by extension European public opinion, look on the use of force very differently than does the United States and American public opinion? This paper looks at that issue by focusing its attention on public opinion in Europe and the question of armed force.

The paper undertakes this study by contrasting public attitudes to two military campaigns that European Powers were actively engaged in, namely the war with Serbia (i.e., Kosovo) in 1999 and the campaign against the Gadhafi regime in Libya (2011). Of course, it is true that many of NATO's European members have been engaged elsewhere in the twelve years that separate these two wars, most obviously Afghanistan, and a far more comprehensive study than this will need to

⁴ Cooper, *The Post Modern State and the Modern World*, p. 31.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace; A Philosophical Essay*, translated with Introduction by M. Campbell Smith, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1917), William James Booth, *Interpreting the World; Kant's philosophy of history and politics* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1986), pp. 144-150, Benjamin Solomon, "Kant's Perpetual Peace; A New Look at this Centuries'-old Quest", *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, Volume 5, No. 1, Summer 2003, pp., 106-126.

⁶ US president Bill Clinton voiced this view in his 1994 inaugural address. For a critique, see Christopher Layne, "Kant or Cant; The myth of the democratic peace", *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Fall 1994, pp. 5-49.

⁷ See, for example, Nicole Gnesotto, "EU, US: visions of the world, visions of the other", Gustav Lindstrom (ed.), *Shift or Rift: Assessing US-EU relations after Iraq* (European Union Institute for Security Studies: Paris, 2003), pp. 21-42, and Alvaro de Vasconcelos, "Introduction – Responding to the Obama moment; the EU and the US in a multipolar moment", Alvaro de Vasconcelos and Marcin Zabrowski (eds.), *The Obama Moment; European and American Perspectives* (European Union Institute for Security Studies: Paris, 2009), pp. 11-24.

examine the evolution of public opinion over the course of such operations. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between that particular operation and the two cases chosen for this paper, especially because the Afghanistan campaign is still underway, eleven years after it began, and it is reasonable to assume that the long-term nature of that commitment has had its own impact on public opinion. But it is also the case that military operations in Afghanistan continue to be conducted far beyond Europe's borders and that sense of distance – both geographic and psychological -- probably affects the thinking of European publics about the nature of that conflict. On the other hand, both of the cases selected for this paper fit the description of what historian Alexander George and others have termed comparable case studies⁸: both were viewed from the outset as relatively minor wars that would terminate soon after hostilities commenced, both were explained to European publics as examples of humanitarian intervention, and the adversary in both cases was presented as an incorrigible dictator who would inflict more needless human suffering unless stopped by military power. This paper does not assume, therefore, that its analysis or conclusions will demonstrate *in toto* the European public perspective on the use of armed force. It does, however, offer a starting point for further research and, in its analysis of the Libyan war, presents a case study that is not yet otherwise available.

⁸ See Alexander George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in Paul G. Lauren (ed.), *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory and Policy* (Free Press: New York, 1979), pp. 43-68, E. Gene DeFelice, "Comparison Misconceived", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, October 1980, pp. 119-126, and Juliet Kaarbo and Ryan Beasley, "A Practical Guide to the Comparative Case Study Method in Political Psychology", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 2, June 1999, pp. 369-391.

2 The Role of Public Opinion

In the course of a House of Commons debate in late-1911, Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey noted that “no British government would embark upon a war without public opinion behind it...”.⁹ A century later, the outgoing Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, stated that a reduction in the size of the US armed forces was inevitable because “the money and the political support simply aren’t there.” And, he continued, the American people would consequently need to redefine their country’s international ambitions in light of inevitable spending cuts.¹⁰ Beyond their immediate contexts, both statements are revealing. They reflect the belief that in a liberal democracy public opinion should and does exercise a significant constraint on a government’s foreign policy and that it often serves, as a German analyst recently asserted, “as a framework for discussions and decision-making processes of the political elite”.¹¹ That perspective would appear to be demonstrated by the frequent references by political leaders to public opinion to legitimize their decisions. But does a statement such as Grey’s really reflect political reality? How exactly does public opinion influence foreign policy decision-making?

It is very difficult to provide conclusive answers to those questions. Despite the useful work undertaken in this field by scholars, we simply do not know for certain how that influence is exercised. For example, do governments help fashion public opinion by their policy-making or vice versa, or is it a reciprocal relationship?¹² Two decades ago, Thomas Risse Kappen argued that there was “strong empirical evidence that domestic [political] structures are the intervening variable between public opinion and foreign policy.”¹³ Refining that argument, other researchers have more recently argued that liberal democracies with proportional representation systems of voting are more responsive to public opinion.¹⁴ Certainly Tony Blair is reported to have been exasperated with his European counterparts who, leading coalition governments as a result of proportional voting systems, had to broker deals back home before agreeing to NATO’s intervention in Kosovo.¹⁵ The emphasis on political institutions, however, fails to accommodate the deviations from expected behaviour that some states have demonstrated, such as the “trajectory of change” that we witnessed in German policy quite soon after reunification and that has persisted. The fundamentals of the German political order have not changed, nor has the emphasis on consensus in policy-making. However, the country’s political leaders have, on occasion (such as over Kosovo in 1999), demonstrated a willingness to confront and ignore public

⁹ UK Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 27 November 1911, Vol. 32, Column 58.

¹⁰ Robert Burns, “Gates: Big budget cuts will diminish US influence”, *Associated Press*, 24 May 2011.

¹¹ Peter Rudolf, “German Foreign Policy and Transatlantic Relations”, *Working Paper*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, July 2004, p. 6.

¹² An argument for reciprocal influence can be found in Christopher Wlezien, “Dynamics of Representation: The Case of US Spending on Defence”, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January 1996, pp. 81-103.

¹³ Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Public Opinion, Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies”, *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 4, July 1991, p. 511.

¹⁴ Sara Binzer Hobolt and Robert Klemmensen, “Responsive Government? Public Opinion and Government Policy Preference in Britain and Denmark”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 53, 2005, p. 380.

¹⁵ Peter Hennessy, *The Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders Since 1945* (Penguin Books: London, 2000), p. 511.

reservations about deploying the *Bundeswehr* in conflict-prone environments.¹⁶ When it exists, the consensus in 1999 over Kosovo and, again, since 2001 and Afghanistan, has been solely concentrated within the policy-making elite, seemingly denying considerable influence (save in a negative sense) to German public opinion. When it did not, as in 2003 over participation in Iraq, the government sided with public opinion against opposition leaders and, according to George W. Bush, its own promises to Washington.¹⁷ Kappen is correct in drawing our attention to institutions, but political structures are only one of many possible means by which public opinion influences policy formulation.

Institutions undoubtedly play a role, but the extent to which they contribute to making public opinion a factor in decision-making probably varies with each country and, of course, with the situation. Strategic culture, national experiences with the use of force, and the personalities of leading policy-makers are, perhaps, of equal importance. In a highly revealing interview on Air Force One in 1991, President George H.W. Bush stated that “[f]rom time to time I look them [opinion polls], but I don’t live by them or make decisions by them.”¹⁸ And, while he is believed to have reacted to public opinion when he withdrew US forces from Somalia in 1993, Bill Clinton similarly argued that a president ought not to be guided by polling data.¹⁹ In Europe, the evidence is equally uncertain. In 2005, European governments approved accession talks to move Turkey toward membership in the EU even though public opinion was generally opposed (the EU averaged only 35 percent in a May 2005 *Euro-barometer*) and, in some countries (such as Germany and France) the support was closer to 20 percent.²⁰ And yet, only six years later, analysts were quick to explain Germany’s abstention at the Security Council during the March 2011 vote for intervention in Libya as a consequence of the Merkel government’s response to hostile public opinion.²¹

Whether a country has the capabilities to deploy military force in a given situation is obviously also of importance in helping to determine the policy options considered by a national government.²² And, indeed, the range of military capabilities that a state acquires and maintains is

¹⁶ Kerry Longhurst makes this argument with regard to German strategic culture in *Germany and the Use of Force* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2004), pp. 140-144.

¹⁷ George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, (Broadway: New York, 2011), p. 234. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has claimed Bush’s recollection is not accurate. The German weekly, *Der Spiegel*, argued in an editorial that neither man’s interpretation is correct. See “Bush made empty promises to Schröder”, *Spiegel*, 13 November 2010.

¹⁸ Douglas C. Foyle, *Counting the Public In: Presidents, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1999), p.191.

¹⁹ After 18 soldiers were killed in October 1993, 69 percent of Americans surveyed believed that US forces should be withdrawn. Public approval of Clinton dropped to 31 percent in the wake of the deaths. See *Ibid*, p. 220.

²⁰ Rudi Guruziu makes this argument in his essay “To what extent is foreign policy making affected by public opinion in a liberal democracy?” A paper presented at the School of Health and Social Services, Middlesex University, January 2008, p. 12 [accessed on 20 October 2011 at www.atlanticcommunity.org/].

²¹ Felix Berenskoetter, “Caught between Kosovo and Iraq: Understanding Germany’s abstention on Libya”, *Shifting Sands: Middle East Blog at LSE*, 21 April 2011 [accessed on 5 November 2011 at blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2011/04/germany-libya/]. Berenskoetter is identified as a Lecturer in International Relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

²² I am grateful to one of the external reviewers who urged that some attention should be paid to military capabilities and organisation as a factor in national decision-making. Anthony King argues that “the problem with the EU may not be that it simply lacks military capabilities or political will. The EU is

a function of what a government believes it needs and what a national public is prepared to countenance, both in terms of defence expenditure and national ambition. Much of the debate surrounding the recent cuts in British defence spending has revolved around the challenge reduced capabilities will present to Britain's traditional global footprint. Interestingly, however, that debate has largely occurred within the political elite: the public are, it would seem from polling, far more prepared to tolerate a diminished world status. This is, very probably, a form of war fatigue, given the Blair government's unprecedented reliance on military power abroad. By early-2007, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, not forgetting Kosovo and Sierra Leone, had apparently led some people in the UK to a reappraisal of both the validity and the efficacy of liberal internationalism that Whitehall was trumpeting. Michael Codner has written that "the war in Iraq removed national confidence in the wisdom of government."²³ The implication of such a charge is that the government would need to rework policy to bring public opinion back on side. And, in a blistering critique published in the 3 June 2007 edition of the *Sunday Times*, prominent political columnist Simon Jenkins assessed Blair's entire approach to be a complete failure. Liberal interventionism was no more than "a verbal backdrop to what was 'feel-good-with-guns'."²⁴ So it might be argued that the reduction in Britain's military capabilities as a result of the October 2010 Strategic Security and Defence Review (SDSR) found favour within British public opinion for one set of reasons even while it was widely viewed by the political elite as a means of addressing the country's difficult economic situation.

That neither the terms of the SDSR, nor the much-reduced Royal Navy, prevented the Cameron government from urging intervention in Libya a year later, despite a divided public (see below, p. 19), demonstrates yet again that determining the relationship between opinion and policy is more than a little difficult. As one study noted, "in reality, the issue of governments' responsiveness to public opinion is complex and defies classification into the polar extremes of either persistent responsiveness or complete unresponsiveness and elite manipulation."²⁵ It is, instead, better conceptualised as a highly dynamic relationship that is influenced by a variety of factors, the ranking of which depends both on national context and circumstance. One scholar has summarized the situation thus:

We may have become increasingly convinced that public opinion is a vital factor in understanding the foreign policy process but we still do not know how precisely it affects

compromised by a fundamental organisational problem. (...) The problem with the EU is not only differences in strategic vision, but also the lack of a dominant framework nation [i.e., the USA]." See his *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces; From the Rhine to Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011), pp. 47-62. The quotation is found on p. 60. However, it is important that even this factor not be taken as too decisive. Germany, for example, is undertaking a major reform of its armed forces in order to be able to contribute more effectively to expeditionary operations. There is no guarantee, however, that even with a modernised *Bundeswehr* in a better organised EU the reluctance Berlin displayed over Libya would disappear.

²³ Michael Codner, "British Defence Policy – Rebuilding National Consensus," *RUSI Journal*, April 2007, p. 18.

²⁴ Claire Taylor and Tom Waldman, *British Defence Policy since 1997* (House of Commons Library Research Paper, 27 June 2008), p. 18.

²⁵ Sara Binzer Hobolt and Robert Klemmensen, "Responsive Government? Public Opinion and Government Policy Preference in Britain and Denmark", *Political Studies*, Vol. 53, 2005, p. 382.

this process. In general, our understanding does not stretch much further than general notions like “permissive consensus” and “restraints on governments’ freedom of action.”²⁶

Suffice it to say, therefore, that while we can and should acknowledge that public opinion has some influence, and on occasion that it can even be decisive, we cannot be certain we know to what degree it will play a role. And in proposing explanations for its influence we must be very wary of presenting it in a way, recalling the warning of a former Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, that it never was “on sea or land.”²⁷

Perhaps the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy is most often the subject of study during periods of international conflict. The explanation for this would seem to be obvious: while most foreign policy matters are generally arcane and emotionally distant from ordinary life, the sacrifices demanded of the citizen by war, either in blood or treasure, are not. Even those people who are not directly impacted might still be affected: conflict necessarily involves human suffering and applied violence, both of which touch upon widely-held normative understandings of appropriate social conduct, such as solidarity, patriotism, and religious values. Nor should the oft-discussed CNN factor be discounted. In an era of the 24 hour news cycle, there is greater immediacy of such events for the general public.²⁸ “Whether the consequences are good or bad,” one author has written in this regard, “and whether we like it or not, the public is always involved in wars, their preparation, conduct or prevention, and whatever their form, as participant or observer.”²⁹ That inescapable fact makes the issue of public opinion an important consideration in understanding foreign policy and international affairs.

²⁶ Philip Everts, “Introduction”, Philip Everts and Pierangelo Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 17.

²⁷ David Knowles, *The Historian and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 4.

²⁸ See Clifford Orwin, “Distant Compassion: CNN and Booriboola-Gha”, *The National Interest*, Spring 1996 [accessed on 20 May 2011 at nationalinterest.org/article/distant-compassion-cnn-and-borriboola-gha-823].

²⁹ Philip Everts, *Democracy and Military Force* (London, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2002), p. 2.

3 Europe and the Use of Military Force

As the intervention in Libya has lasted longer than originally expected, an obvious concern for NATO-Europe was the level of support for the mission among their publics. In the modern era, governments are visibly wary lest public opinion turn hostile to the mission, for that could result in the loss of domestic support and much greater political complications. That concern, while it can be exaggerated, is not entirely unwarranted. In early-2010, for example, the governing coalition in the Netherlands led by Premier Jan Peter Balkenende collapsed as a result of its attempt to maintain a military presence in Afghanistan in the face of hostile public opinion.³⁰

Equally important, this focus on the outlook of European publics can also be set against a much broader canvas than only the Libyan operation itself. For alongside the general belief that public opinion often acts as a restraint on government actions, there is an assumption in some policy circles (particularly in the US) that European publics are instinctively opposed to the use of military force as an instrument of national policy. Nearly a decade ago, Robert Kagan argued that a serious transatlantic divide had emerged and was widening in large measure because of differing attitudes to the use of armed force. In “Power and Weakness” (2002), he asserted that the US and Europe approach world affairs with different sets of operational parameters:

Europeans insist they approach problems with greater nuance and sophistication [*than do Americans*]. They try to influence others through subtlety and indirection. They are more tolerant of failure, more patient when solutions don’t come quickly. *They generally favor peaceful responses to problems, preferring negotiation, diplomacy, and persuasion to coercion* [emphasis added]. They are quicker to appeal to international law, international conventions, and international opinion to adjudicate disputes. They try to use commercial and economic ties to bind nations together. They often emphasize process over result, believing that ultimately process can become substance.³¹

Although he wrote the essay in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, where the differences between Washington and many of its European allies were brought into specific relief, Kagan’s contrast of *Mars* (the US) and *Venus* (NATO-Europe) has continued to define what many see as an increasingly important divergence in the trans-Atlantic alliance.³² In February 2010, the then-Secretary of Defence, Robert M. Gates, warned Washington’s allies that people in the US were generally concerned about the “demilitarisation of Europe”:

Right now, the alliance faces very serious, long-term, systemic problems. The NATO budgetary crisis is a case in point and a symptom of deeper problems with the way NATO perceives threats, formulates requirements, and prioritizes and allocates resources. (...) The demilitarization of Europe – where large swaths of the general public and political class are averse to military force and the risks that go with it – has gone from a

³⁰ Nichoals Kulish, “Dutch Government Collapse Over its Stance on Troops for Afghanistan”, *The New York Times*, 21 February 2010.

³¹ Robert Kagan, “Power and Weakness”, *Policy Interest*, 1 June 2002 [accessed on 27 May 2011 at www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/7107].

³² For the immediate post-9/11 differences within NATO over the use of force, see Richard Rupp, *NATO after 9/11; An Alliance in Continuing Decline* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2006).

bleeding in the 20th century to an impediment to achieving real security and lasting peace in the 21st. Not only can real or perceived weakness be a temptation to miscalculation and aggression, but, on a more basic level, the resulting funding and capability shortfalls make it difficult to operate and fight together to confront shared threats.³³

Academics in the United States, such as Andrew Bacevich, have also echoed what has since come to be known as the *Kagan thesis*:

By the dawn of this century, Europeans had long since lost their stomach for battle. The change was not simply political. It was profoundly cultural. The cradle of Western civilization -- and incubator of ambitions that drenched the contemporary age in blood -- had become thoroughly debellized. (...) This pacification of Europe is quite likely to prove irreversible.³⁴

Words have a way of slipping from their author's control, and it is true that at the time that he published his essay (some might call it a polemic) Kagan admitted that such a self-perception was a caricature that oversimplified reality and he warned his readers not to generalise about Europeans. (That warning might also be applied to Americans, since the current president is often accused by some of his detractors as being far more "European" than his predecessors.³⁵) More sophisticated analyses are now available that addresses this issue.³⁶

The argument that the strategic cultures of many countries in NATO-Europe have diverged from that of their American ally nevertheless continues to be a widely debated topic in both the scholarly literature and policy-making circles.³⁷ That debate is fuelled, in part, by data obtained from opinion polling. There is considerable survey evidence that, broadly speaking, public opinion in Europe is uneasy about the use of force as an instrument of their countries' foreign policies. Hostile public reaction to the US-led war with Iraq in 2003 certainly influenced European governments at the time, with large majorities in both France (66 percent) and Germany (81 percent) opposed³⁸: and, six months before hostilities commenced, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder parleyed his own very public opposition to Washington's willingness to consider war with Iraq into a successful bid for re-election. The ongoing Chilcot Inquiry, with a

³³ *Remarks as delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., February 23, 2010* [accessed on 2 September 2011 at www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1423].

³⁴ Andrew Bacevich, "Let Europe be Europe", *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2010 [online version].

³⁵ See, for example, Michael Barone, "Unlike Obama, Americans reject European model", *The Washington Examiner*, 18 October 2009 [accessed on 12 May 2011 at <http://washingtonexaminer.com/politics/unlike-obama-americans-reject-european-model>], Michael Biskin, "Obama's radicalism is killing the Dow", *Wall Street Journal*, 6 March 2009, Thomas Straubhaar, "Obama's Misguided Approach: America has become too European", *Der Spiegel*, 9 February 2010.

³⁶ One of the most interesting recent studies that discusses such differences in a trans-Atlantic setting, but also in Europe, is Emil Kirchner and James Sperling, *National Security Cultures; patterns of Global Governance* (Routledge: London, 2010). It provides a country-by-country study of what the authors refer to as the security cultures of the European Powers.

³⁷ For an overview see Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and the Ways of War* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York, 2006), pp. 45-52.

³⁸ William Boston, "European leaders, public at odds over war with Iraq", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 2003.

mandate to investigate Great Britain's involvement in the Iraq War, testifies to the lingering negative public sentiments surrounding the Blair government's decision to support the US invasion in 2003. In fact, the largest anti-war demonstration in British history took place in February 2003 just shortly before hostilities commenced.³⁹ By way of contrast, monthly Gallup polling reveals that a majority of Americans has consistently (save for a period from July 2004 to April 2005) supported their country's participation in that war.⁴⁰

Polling results have revealed that public opinion in some European countries has opposed the resort to military force even when failing to do so represented a challenge to core principles enshrined in international law that are otherwise broadly endorsed. For example, immediately before the start of Operation Desert Storm (1991), 50 percent of Germans surveyed opposed using military force to expel Iraq from Kuwait even if a peaceful settlement was not available.⁴¹ This position was held despite the Bonn/Berlin Republic's long-held view that borders cannot be changed by force and international aggression cannot be rewarded. Nearly a decade later, in August 2000, an absolute majority of Germans opposed their country's involvement for any reason in either UN- or NATO-led military operations; and, only eight percent believed that Berlin should participate in future US-led operations.⁴² Clearly these results that predate the trans-Atlantic crisis during the presidency of George W. Bush, indicate that something more than anti-Bush feeling is present in German public consciousness. Possibly more interesting results have been observed in polling of public attitudes in Italy. In 1986, only 30 percent approved the Reagan administration's use of air-strikes against Libya in response to that country's support for terrorism: in the same poll only 18 percent supported a hypothetical Italian military response if Libya were to conduct terrorist attacks in Italy.⁴³ Only four percent of Italians supported the US-led intervention in the Second Gulf War (1991)⁴⁴ and, two days after the outbreak of the Kosovo War, 72 percent of Italians "were in favour of giving space to a diplomatic effort."⁴⁵ Despite very strong antiwar sentiments, both countries have participated in out-of-area missions – both, for example, contributed to the NATO-led mission in Kosovo and Afghanistan – suggesting that, while public opinion may have played a role in government thinking at the time such deployments are decided, it was not decisive.

With regard to Afghanistan, the longest out-of-area mission conducted by NATO, polling continues to provide evidence that the US/European divide on the use of force exists. The *Transatlantic Trends 2008* poll conducted by the German Marshall Fund showed that nearly equal numbers of those surveyed in America and Europe supported use of military units for protection of development projects (73 and 79 percent), for assisting with the training of Afghan police forces (76 and 68 percent), and combating narcotics production (70 and 76 percent). However, when asked about support for combat operations against Taliban-supported units, 76

³⁹ "'Million' march against Iraq war", BBC News, 16 February 2003.

⁴⁰ Gallup, *Iraq* [accessed on 28 May 2011 at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1633/Iraq.aspx>].

⁴¹ Wilhelm Haumann and Thomas Petersen, "German Public Opinion on the Iraq Conflict: A Passing Crisis With the USA or a Lasting Departure?", *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2004, p. 317.

⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 316-317, and 319.

⁴³ Pierangelo Isernia, "Italian public opinion and the international use of force", in Everts and Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, p. 92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 102.

percent of Americans endorsed such a mission as against only 43 percent of Europeans.⁴⁶ Similarly, in *Transatlantic Trends 2009*, majorities in the leading European Powers favoured either a reduction in numbers of troops deployed to Afghanistan or their complete withdrawal: in Great Britain (59 percent), Germany (57 percent), Italy (55 percent) and France (51 percent). There was only minimal support for increasing the numbers of troops deployed (i.e., increasing the national contribution) as US President Barack Obama had urged: in Great Britain (11 percent), Germany (seven percent), Italy (six percent) and France (four percent). By way of contrast, only 27 percent of Americans surveyed supported a reduction in the numbers deployed or their complete withdrawal and 30 percent supported an increase in their country's national contribution.⁴⁷ Perhaps the most significant finding came two years later, when *Transatlantic Trends 2011* revealed that only 23 percent of those surveyed in the European Union (EU) supported the argument that war was sometimes necessary to obtain justice: 76 percent of Americans took the opposite position.⁴⁸

Such results, however, are never conclusive. Other survey findings seem to suggest that Europeans are not necessarily opposed to the use of force as a general principle and their position appears to be qualified by the mission being considered. Indeed, on occasion European and American attitudes can appear to be quite similar. An interesting example is the reaction to Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons capability. *Transatlantic Trends 2011* shows nearly universal concern with Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. Overwhelming majorities in Europe (80 percent) and in the US (86 percent) are alarmed by that prospect.⁴⁹ Indeed, a survey conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project identified a nuclear-armed Iran as the leading international threat for the US (82 percent), Spain (81 percent), Germany (79 percent), Italy (78 percent), France (74 percent) and Great Britain (68 percent).⁵⁰ When asked in *Transatlantic Trends 2011* survey to identify the best way to prevent Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, the survey indicates that only six percent support of Europeans favour using military force, or exactly the same level of support for the idea of accepting a nuclear-armed Iran. Economic incentives (35 percent) and the imposition of economic sanctions (28 percent) are the preferred options. What is interesting in the responses to this particular question is that, while a comparable level of support was found in the US (nine percent) for a military response, Americans were more inclined to use economic sanctions (41 percent) against Iran and less to rely on economic incentives (26 percent).⁵¹ It would seem, therefore, that the Kagan thesis is only partly supported. Neither Americans nor Europeans want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons nor do they favour the use of military force to prevent that outcome if other options are effective. However, these results nonetheless show that Europeans tend to seek negotiated settlements, while the US public is far more inclined to a policy of confrontation. This assessment holds even when, as the consideration of sanctions demonstrates, armed force is not the preferred option.

⁴⁶ German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Transatlantic Trends 2008: Key findings* (2008), p.13.

⁴⁷ German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Transatlantic Trends 2009: Top Line Data* (2009), Q12.

⁴⁸ German Marshall Fund of the United States, *Transatlantic Trends: Leaders 2011, Key Findings* (2011), p. 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Erin Carriere-Kretschmer, "Europeans and Americans Share Concerns About Iran's Nuclear Program", *Pew Research Center Publications*, 18 November 2008 [accessed on 3 May 2011 at pewresearch.org/pubs/1416/iran-nuclear-weapons-international-concern-survey-findings].

⁵¹ *Transatlantic Trends: Leaders 2011, Key Findings* (2011), pp. 13.

Serious differences are further revealed in responses to additional questions in the same poll. When members of the general public in Europe who had initially favoured a non-military response (or 82 percent of respondents) were asked to choose between only two options – “take military action” or accept a nuclear-armed Iran – should all other means to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons fail, nearly half (46 percent) supported a military option as opposed to a policy of acquiescence (35 percent). However, a clear majority (62 percent) of US participants who originally preferred a non-military option (or 91 percent of respondents) favoured a military option. Those in the US who initially identified a non-military response were more willing to countenance the use of force than their European counterparts if all other options were shown to be ineffective. Interestingly, individuals identified as leaders in both the US and Europe were far less supportive of the military option than their general publics. The response by US leaders to the two options (42 and 50 percent) was comparable to that of the general public in Europe, while the outlook of European leaders (32 and 51 percent) was even more pacific.⁵² The Kagan thesis would seem to be borne out – Europeans, but particularly their leaders, have a much greater level of unease about the use of military power than do Americans – even if, as this survey result indicates, Europeans are not implacably opposed to the use of armed force.

⁵² Ibid, p. 14.

4 European Public Opinion and the Kosovo War (1999)

The Kosovo War is an important case study for understanding European attitudes toward out-of-area military operations. Unlike the two Gulf Wars, and indeed the war in Afghanistan that began two years later, the Kosovo conflict took place in Europe's neighbourhood. It was, therefore, perceived from the outset as a European problem, particularly as many members of the EU had already had to confront waves of refugees from earlier conflicts that had followed the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The Kosovo problem was also understood, almost from the concluding months of the Bosnian Civil War, as an issue that NATO would likely have to deal with. In fact, the Dayton Peace Settlement (November 1995) was heavily criticised at the time for not addressing the issue of Kosovo. Moreover, there was never any expectation that the international community writ large would want to assume a predominant position in dealing with the problem. US leadership was admittedly instrumental in late-1998 and early-1999 in orchestrating the NATO-led response to the ethnic unrest.⁵³ However, most governments in NATO-Europe quickly appreciated as the fighting intensified there that the Kosovo conflict was a direct challenge to the Alliance's ability to guarantee stability in the European area. As Ellen Hallams has recently argued, "NATO leaders were instrumental in ensuring not only allied support for any intervention, but also in ensuring, unlike in Bosnia, the alliance would be involved from the very beginning of international efforts to resolve the crisis."⁵⁴

Although there were widespread concerns that the conflict in Kosovo posed a significant threat to the stability of south-eastern Europe, the NATO-led intervention was presented to the public almost exclusively as a humanitarian operation. It was, in other words, an unavoidable mission due to the purportedly genocidal policies of the Milosevic regime in Belgrade. There was no hint of neutrality in the NATO response to the events on the ground, either in the run-up to the war with Serbia or after hostilities commenced: nor could there be. The legitimacy of the conflict was discussed by political leaders within a concisely argued and easily comprehended good versus evil paradigm. Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, Germany's most popular political leader at the time, framed it in precisely those terms for his otherwise sceptical countrymen when he compared the ethnic conflict with the Holocaust: "I have not only learned: No more war. I have also learned: No more Auschwitz."⁵⁵ Czech president Vaclav Havel argued that the war with Serbia was possibly the first time countries had used military power solely in defence of human rights:

⁵³ The role played by the US in the run-up to the intervention in Kosovo validates Anthony King's argument about the organisational differences between the EU and NATO. See King, *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces*, pp. 60-61. However, it should be recalled that the discussion of taking military action occurred almost exclusively within NATO and did not include, as happened later over Libya, take place in both institutions.

⁵⁴ Ellen Hallams, *The United States and NATO since 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 37.

⁵⁵ Fischer is quoted in Nico Fried, "Ich habe gelernt: Nie wieder Auschwitz", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 Januar 2005.

If one can say of any war that it is ethical, or that it is being waged for ethical reasons, then it is true of this war. (...) [N]o decent person can stand by and watch the systematic, state-directed murder of other people.⁵⁶

Perhaps the strongest advocate of intervention, British Prime Minister Tony Blair argued that the Western democracies' commitment to uphold moral values in global affairs was inextricably challenged by the confrontation between Belgrade and its Albanian minority.⁵⁷

The public was understandably horrified by the media reports of what was happening in Kosovo, including both real and exaggerated atrocities, and it seems reasonable to assume that European political leaders in their own approaches captured the popular feeling that something ought to be done. Consequently, when the US-led negotiations with Serbia broke down at Rambouillet in March 1999, and NATO allies decided to follow up on the threats directed at Belgrade, public support in some European countries was quite high for the initial military response (i.e., airstrikes) that followed: in Great Britain and the Netherlands support stood at 68 percent, and at around 60 percent in France and Germany. Interestingly, that endorsement was not universal, for both Italy and Greece (given its longstanding historical ties with Serbia) did not support the use of force. In fact, a slim majority of the Italian public (53 percent) opposed NATO's military option preferring only a negotiated settlement.⁵⁸ For most other European publics, however, the response to developments on the ground was less nuanced. As the images of Albanian refugees arriving at makeshift camps in Macedonia and Albania were broadcast on the nightly news, alongside gruesome stories (many subsequently shown to be false) of butchery by Serbian military and police forces, the legitimacy of the military intervention was reinforced.

The figures for public support were deceptive, however, for different attitudes quickly became apparent when additional questions were posed. It seems very likely that both national governments and the large segment of the general public that endorsed the intervention were persuaded that it would be relatively cost-free. In August and September 1995, NATO's use of air-strikes in Bosnia forced Belgrade to the negotiating table with the loss of only one aircraft. This experience was translated into a firm belief among NATO leaders that a similar strategy would work in Kosovo. That there were public reservations about the nature of the NATO military operation in Kosovo was confirmed in an Angus Reid poll (late-April 1999) that asked whether additional military forces should be sent to aid the mission or more effort should be expended on finding a diplomatic solution. In France, Germany and Italy, support for a greater military commitment was minimal (at 12, 12 and 11 percent respectively).⁵⁹ By contrast, support for greater diplomatic efforts captured 51 percent in France, 47 percent in Germany and 59 percent in Italy. The results from Great Britain were noticeably at variance with its continental partners, as 29 percent of the people surveyed supported a greater military commitment and 33 percent endorsed further diplomacy.⁶⁰ This can possibly be explained by the effort made by the

⁵⁶ Havel is quoted in Mark Amstutz, *International Ethics: Concepts, Theories and cases in Global Politics*, 2nd edition (Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, Maryland, 2005), p. 24.

⁵⁷ Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (Alfred K. Knopf: New York, 2010), p. 247. See also David Aaronovich, "Tony Blair: The war? I believed in it, I believed in it then, I believe in it now", *The Times* (London), 17 November 2007.

⁵⁸ Philip Everts, "War without bloodshed? Public Opinion and the conflict over Kosovo", in Everts and Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, pp. 234-235.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 236.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 238.

Blair government to advance the view that Britain had a responsibility to uphold universal values – a position that was announced during the war as a pillar of New Labour’s foreign policy in a speech (22 April) given by the prime minister at the time.⁶¹ For the other Allies, intervention seemed to be viewed as acceptable only if the risks of casualties were minimal.

European publics were obviously conflicted when their governments resorted to military force in 1999. On one hand, majorities in most countries supported the intervention as an appropriate response. At the same time, however, those same publics did not want a greater military commitment that might have ensured a speedier and more complete victory preferring, instead, a renewed effort at finding a peaceful settlement. European publics might be prepared to countenance the use of force, but they are very uncomfortable about doing so even when a cause is presented which appeals to deeply-held normative beliefs. Other than just referring back to the Kagan thesis, what factors might explain this reticence? Philip Everts, a British political scientist who has studied this issue extensively, has concluded that, with regard to the use of force, three factors influence European public opinion: (1) the perceived legitimacy of the operation; (2) the effectiveness of the military action, and; (3) the likelihood of casualties. All three were clearly present during the Kosovo campaign, although they do not appear to have had an equal impact on public sentiments.

With regard to the first criterion, namely the legitimacy of the mission itself, polls suggested that most European publics viewed the NATO-led operation as a morally appropriate response. The intervention was seen as a means of redressing the Serbian government’s systematic violations of human rights and its inappropriate treatment (including purportedly genocidal behaviour) of its Albanian-Kosovar minority. The so-called Racak massacre (15 January 1999) in which a group of 45 Albanians had been gunned down, although acting as a trigger for NATO’s increasingly hard-line approach to the Kosovo problem, only served to confirm for many in Europe that Serbia was governed by a criminal regime.⁶² By late-April 1999, six weeks into the campaign, 82 percent in France, 74 percent in Germany, 68 percent in Great Britain, and 88 percent of respondents in Italy believed that the outcome of the campaign should either be independence for Kosovo or some form of autonomy.⁶³ The *status quo ante bellum*, that would have endorsed Belgrade’s policy aim, was viewed as completely unacceptable to the vast majority of Europeans in the four countries surveyed. There is little reason to doubt, therefore, that the Kosovo intervention was widely viewed as a legitimate response to a request for assistance from a beleaguered people. Polling surrounding the Kosovo campaign appears to demonstrate that when a strong case for intervention is convincingly made, a natural reticence toward the use of armed force can be overcome.

Opinion polling at the time also revealed that European publics were tolerant of a slower than expected pace in the military campaign. Rapid victory in this instance was not necessary to maintain that level of public support. Although NATO’s Kosovo air campaign took longer than expected, and even when the overall strategy was questioned by the general public, polling results

⁶¹ Office of Tony Blair, “Tony Blair Speech to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs”, 22 April 1999 [accessed on 2 June 2011 at [www.tonyblairoffice.org/speeches/entry/tony-blair-speech-to-chicago-council-on-global-affairs/].

⁶² David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace*, (Scribner: New York, 2001), p. 410.

⁶³ Philip Everts, “War without bloodshed? Public Opinion and the conflict over Kosovo”, in Everts and Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, p. 241.

showed continuing support for the military effort underway. In mid-April, a strong majority (70 percent) in France viewed the NATO air strikes against Serbia as ineffective, but that assessment had little impact on support for what was widely viewed as a humanitarian mission.⁶⁴ Similar findings were revealed in polling conducted in Germany, Great Britain and Italy. A late-April 1999 poll indicated that while 68 percent of Germans supported the intervention only 20 percent believed that the air campaign would be effective.⁶⁵ A widely held belief that stated strategic objectives were not yet within reach did not put a significant dent in the public support for the overall mission. In fact, an Angus Reid poll at about the same time showed clear majorities in France, Britain, Germany and Italy endorsing the view that NATO was doing a good job in “managing its military campaign against Yugoslavia”.⁶⁶ The public endorsement of the NATO-led missions was obviously deeply rooted in the purpose (i.e., the perceived legitimacy), rather than the conduct (i.e., the military effectiveness), of the military operation.

Studies nonetheless suggest that governments in NATO-Europe were very much concerned by public attitudes about possible casualties arising from participation in the Kosovo campaign. Opinion polling at the time indicated that anxiety was warranted, but even in addressing this always controversial subject the findings are unclear. Philip Everts notes that some public surveys revealed support for the mission even when the issue of casualties was directly addressed. A poll conducted in the Netherlands in October 1998, five months before hostilities commenced, showed that the level of support for a hypothetical military intervention in Kosovo was unaffected by any consideration of Dutch military casualties. Six months later, the level of support for the ongoing mission was unchanged. In Great Britain, however, fear of casualties sometimes produced inconsistent findings. One poll (late-March 1999), taken at the time that another survey indicated strong support for the intervention, revealed that 56 percent of those surveyed agreed that the protection of the Albanian Kosovars was not sufficient cause to justify British military casualties.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, similar surveys from other countries are unavailable.

A more useful indicator of public attitudes in Europe regarding casualties might be the level of support for the commitment of ground forces. Not only would this have meant an increased level of military commitment to the Kosovo campaign, but it would also have represented a significant intensification of the military effort: a transformation of the mission from cost-free air-strikes and, given the Yugoslav forces’ fearsome reputation in defensive operations, an increased probability of casualties. That perception also appears to have been held by respondents. When surveys were conducted concerning the possible introduction of NATO-led ground forces into the war, support for the war immediately dropped. One such poll showed that while in France the decline (down five percent) was negligible, in other countries the difference was considerable: in Britain (down 14 percent), in Germany and the Netherlands (down 33 percent), and in Italy (down 10 percent).⁶⁸ Only in Great Britain, despite the drop in support, and France did a majority of the public continue to endorse the mission if ground troops were deployed. It is understandable that with the exception of Tony Blair, who angered his Allies by his strong advocacy of deploying ground forces, European leaders were openly reluctant to consider such a step. Joschka Fischer,

⁶⁴ Nathalie La Balme, “The French and the use of force; Public Perceptions and their impact on the policy-making process”, in Everts and Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, p. 194.

⁶⁵ “The war divides”, *The Economist*, 22 April 1999.

⁶⁶ Philip Everts, “War without bloodshed? Public Opinion and the conflict over Kosovo”, in Everts and Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, p. 250.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 243.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 236.

for example, warned in an interview on US television that such a step would not have the support of a majority in the Bundestag: “No party in the German government, not the conservatives are supporting that [sic]. So we would have a split parliament or a majority against us.”⁶⁹ It is reasonable to assume, as many commentators have, that almost all NATO governments “refused to countenance the use of ground forces for fear of a backlash from public opinion.”⁷⁰

Despite such polling, the numbers might give a misleading portrait of the “body-bag syndrome” in Europe. Indeed, there might not be a general *European* attitude to casualties. If one looks at France, as an obvious example, public opinion does not always seem to be greatly affected by military casualties. One researcher, based on an analysis of ten years of polling (1988 to 1998), has argued that the importance that “the French public grants to humanitarian values and to the defence of the more general values that symbolise Western society” means that it is in favour of using military force even “at the expense of risking their own life[sic].”⁷¹ A study conducted in 2005 by Turkish political scientist Ebru Canan concluded that the response to possible casualties depended very much for what purpose military forces were being deployed. She observed that European support for the use of force in Kosovo even when casualties were a possibility remained high (66 percent) when the purpose was expressly humanitarian intervention (e.g., civilian protection). However, when the goal was to direct internal political change (i.e., “to subdue the forces of oppression of President Milosevic”) or to cover the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army from the province, support dropped to 31 and 54 percent respectively. “In other words,” Canan concluded, “even if a more risky action was to be taken there was high European support for humanitarian intervention in Kosovo.”⁷²

As with any public policy issue, attitudes toward the use of force over Kosovo were obviously affected by a multitude of factors, not excluding questions that were not asked in the surveys. Some factors will almost certainly be unique to each European country: France’s *mission civilitrice*, Germany’s “security culture of restraint”, and Italy’s very limited international ambitions after 1945. Generalised statements that Europeans are opposed to the use of force, given the evidence of polling during the Kosovo campaign, do not appear to be warranted in all circumstances; and, even when there is a threat of casualties, one must take into account the public’s perception of the mission’s overall purpose. Indeed, the findings of several polls suggest that the presumed influence of the “body-bag syndrome” might well be exaggerated. That said, it is important to qualify this observation by noting that the polling on the impact of casualties taken during the Kosovo War is largely hypothetical. Given the minimal losses incurred by NATO forces, we do not know if there would have been an inverse correlation between public support of the mission and a specific number of casualties. We can only hypothesise what the public reaction

⁶⁹ See the interview with Joschka Fischer at “The German Perspective”, *Jim Lehrer Newshour Transcript*, 25 May 1999 [accessed on 28 May 2011 at www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/jan-june99/fischer_5-25.html].

⁷⁰ Philip Everts, *Democracy and Military Force*, p. 173.

⁷¹ Nathalie La Balme, “The French and the use of force; Public Perceptions and their impact on the policy-making process”, in Everts and Isernia (eds.), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, p. 192.

⁷² Ebru Canan, “Comparative Analysis of American and European Public Opinion on the Post-Cold War Use of Military Force: Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq”, Paper prepared for delivery at the 46th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1-5 March 2005 [accessed on 12 May 2011 at www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/6/9/8/5/pages69852/p69852-1.php], p. 28.

would have been to a significant loss of life had a ground invasion of Kosovo and Serbia taken place.

5 Europe and the Intervention in Libya (2010)

On 17 March, UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1973 was approved by a vote of 10 in favour, with five members abstaining. The resolution, proposed by the United Kingdom and France with strong US backing, authorised a number of actions designed to prevent the Gadhafi regime from using military force to re-impose its rule in Libya. The rebel alliance against the Libyan leadership had already suffered considerable setbacks and the momentum had apparently shifted to Gadhafi's loyalists by the time the vote took place. Nevertheless, urged forward by a combination of security, economic and humanitarian considerations, the sponsors of the resolution had determined that measures in addition to the sanctions authorised under UNSC Resolution 1970 (26 February) were required. UNSC Resolution 1973 demanded an "immediate cease-fire", imposed a ban on flights by aircraft owned or operated by Libyan nationals within the country, tightened economic sanctions on financial institutions as well as individuals associated with the regime, and reinforced the already existing arms embargo. Strikingly, the resolution drew upon Chapter VII of the UN Charter to authorise member-states "to take all necessary measures (...) to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack" and, to that end, established a no-fly zone in Libyan airspace.⁷³ Twelve days later, NATO took control of the mission and a Canadian, Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard, assumed operational command.

Although NATO is again in charge of a mission in a country on the periphery of the Alliance, the Libyan intervention is of a very different sort from that of Kosovo. Most obvious, is the reduced role of the United States that, under the Obama administration, elected to play only a supporting role while allowing Great Britain and France to lead. And then there is the nature of the adversary. The Gadhafi regime has long been a thorn in the side of the West, having long been a sponsor of terrorism. Its international rehabilitation after 2003 was, however, not accompanied by any positive changes to its appalling human rights record. Unlike the impoverished and resource-deprived Yugoslav province of Kosovo, extensive economic and political ties between EU members and Libya were developed once international sanctions were lifted. Libya is of interest to the European Powers largely because of energy resources (see Figure One), but also because of its investments in their countries, and its geographic proximity to Italy and Greece (i.e., Crete). Over 85 percent of Libya's oil production is exported to European (both EU and non-EU) countries.⁷⁴ While the aggregate for the EU (10 percent in the first eight months of 2010) might not seem significant, it was the third largest supplier after

**Figure One:
Oil Imports from Libya (% of total)
EU Members**

Ireland	23
Italy	22
Austria	21
France	16
Greece	15
Spain	12
Portugal	11
United Kingdom	9
Germany	8
Netherlands	2

Non-EU members

Switzerland	19
China	3
Australia	2
USA	0.5

Source: International Energy Agency, *Facts on Libya: oil and gas* (21 February 2011).

⁷³ United Nations, Security Council, *S/RES/1973* (2011).

⁷⁴ International Energy Agency, *Facts on Libya: oil and gas*, 21 February 2011 [accessed on 15 March 2011 at www.iea.org/files/facts_libya.pdf].

Russia (30 percent) and Norway (14 percent).⁷⁵ Libya also supplied three percent of Europe's natural gas needs, largely to Spain and via the Greenstream underwater pipeline to Italy and Greece.⁷⁶ Shortly after the rebellion against Gadhafi began, Libya's export of oil and gas to the EU fell by two-thirds, contributing to the rapid increase in fuel prices and threatening to undermine further the fragile economies of some EU members and derail the recovery of others.⁷⁷

Libya is also very heavily invested in Europe, and its sovereign wealth fund is the 13th largest in the world. Many European countries have benefitted from the investment by Tripoli of oil revenues, particularly in the banking and financial sector: for example, Libya is reported to be heavily involved with the London-based British-Arab Commercial Bank, the Paris-based Banque internationale arabe, and in Madrid's Banco Arabe Espagnol.⁷⁸ Indeed, a listing of Libyan investments shows extensive economic connections throughout Europe, including construction companies, real estate (an estimated £13 billion in Great Britain), and even publishing (e.g., a three percent share of Pearson that owns Britain's well-respected daily, *The Financial Times*). That these monies have been used as a bargaining chip in relations with European capitals seems hard to dispute. In the case of Great Britain, the normalisation of relations with Libya immediately following the controversial release of the Lockerbie bomber, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, in August 2009 led to a large infusion of funds, nearly £80 billion, by the Libyan Investment Authority.⁷⁹ France likewise benefitted from harmonising Europe's ties with Libya, including contracts to construct a nuclear reactor, a desalination plant and a major deal with Airbus.⁸⁰ But no country has benefitted more than Italy. Libya's involvement in that country's economy is such that on 21 February, following the first weekend of violent clashes, the Italian stock market declined by 3.6 percent. The next day, according to one commentator, only a technical glitch that prevented the Borsa from opening on time avoided "the panic-selling of Italian-held stocks and any further damage to Italy's markets."⁸¹

Despite these ties, most governments in Europe would be happy to see Gadhafi leave the political stage. Nevertheless, there was only limited public support at the outset of the rebellion to countenance anything stronger than a hard diplomatic line and economic sanctions. An early-March poll originally published in *The Sunday Times* revealed that while 69 percent of Britons favoured economic sanctions, and 56 percent a no-fly zone, only 11 percent supported the idea of putting British troops on the ground in Libya.⁸² A poll published around the same time in *France*

⁷⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Energy, *Registration of Crude Oil Imports and Deliveries in the European Union, 1-8/2010*, Brussels, 2010 [accessed on 15 March 2011 at ec.europa.eu/energy/observatory/oil/doc/import/coi/eu-coi-from-extra-eu-2010-01-08.pdf].

⁷⁶ Marco Thomas Picardi, "What's at Stake for Italy in Libya", *Limes – Heartland*, 3 March 2011 [accessed on 15 March 2011 at temi.repubblica.it/limes-heartland/whats-at-stake-for-italy-in-libya/1697].

⁷⁷ "Libyen-Krise wird zur Gefahr für die Weltwirtschaft", *Die Welt*, 1 März 2011.

⁷⁸ For a listing of the estimated size of Libyan investments in such companies, see "La chasse aux fond Kadhafi passe par une trentaine de pays", *Le Temps* (Geneva), 12 March 2011.

⁷⁹ Robert Mendick, Philip Sherwell and Andrew Alderson, "Special Report: the Libya investment firm and the release of the Lockerbie bomber", *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 2010.

⁸⁰ Daniela Stahl and Christoph Wöss, "France and Italy share strong ties with Libya's Gadhafi", *Deutsche Welle*, 22 February 2011, and "France to Build Nuclear reactor in Libya", *Der Spiegel*, 26 July 2007.

⁸¹ Picardi, "What's at Stake for Italy in Libya."

⁸² Katie Anderson and Hannah Thompson, "Libya: British support sanctions", *YouGov.uk*, 8 March 2011 [accessed on 15 March 2011 at today.yougoc.uk/politics/Libya-british-support-sanctions].

Soir indicated that 69 percent opposed any military intervention, without apparently distinguishing between different options.⁸³ Even more opposition was to be found in Germany: in an opinion survey published in *Europa Online Magazine*, 78 percent stated that they did not support a military intervention in Libya, while only 16 percent indicated they would.⁸⁴

Results of comprehensive surveys of European attitudes since the intervention in Libya was authorised were available in the first weeks surrounding the intervention. Such polling results reveal that public opinion was changing as events in the Middle East unfolded. The findings of one poll, conducted in early-March 2011 for the French Catholic daily *La Croix*, revealed that large numbers of respondents in Italy (76 percent), Spain (sixty-six percent), Great Britain (fifty three percent), France (fifty three percent) and Germany (48 percent) were fearful of the ongoing developments in the Middle East. Most were concerned about the likelihood of an “increasing number of immigrants” moving toward Europe or the coming to power of Islamic parties.⁸⁵ A month later, an IPSOS poll revealed a more optimistic interpretation of ongoing developments. The majority of Europeans (69 percent) believed that the uprisings underway in the Middle East, sometimes known as the Arab Spring, will lead “to meaningful improvements” in the day-to-day lives of the people of that region. The numbers varied from country to country, with Germany (55 percent) at the low end of the scale and Italy (at 84 percent) the most optimistic. However, that optimism is significantly qualified when respondents were asked if they thought that the uprisings would “create real democratic governments where their citizens can both vote and have a real say.” Only 46 percent of European surveyed believed that the Middle Eastern countries would experience such a transformation, with Great Britain (41 percent) below the European average and Sweden (at 55 percent) above.⁸⁶

With specific regard to the military intervention, an IPSOS-MORI poll was undertaken in mid-April 2011, a month after the Libyan campaign commenced. It shows that only in France did a clear majority (63 percent) endorse the mission. In Great Britain, the public was evenly divided; while in Italy 60 percent opposed the intervention.⁸⁷ Germany, having abstained during the Security Council vote on 15 March, was not included in the poll. Nevertheless, Berlin’s decisions to abstain and, later, to refuse to participate in the military mission, were assumed to be heavily influenced by the Merkel government’s fear of hostile public opinion.⁸⁸ Opinion polling at that time indicated that while the majority of Germans supported the NATO-led intervention in Libya when it was first authorised, an equal-sized majority opposed any participation by the *Bundeswehr*.⁸⁹ The acknowledged moral *right-ness* of the mission had no effect on the German’s public attitude about their own country’s role.

⁸³ “Une intervention militaire des Français en Libye? C’est non!”, *France Soir*, 9 mars 2011.

⁸⁴ “Umfrage: Große Mehrheit gegen Militärschlag”, *Europa Online Magazine*, 15 März 2011 [accessed on 12 April 2011 at www.europaonline-magazine.eu/umfrage-grosse-mehrheit-gegen-militarschlag_116238.html].

⁸⁵ IFOP, Département Opinion et Stratégies d’Entreprise, *Europe and the Arab Revolutions*, March 2011.

⁸⁶ IPSOS, *Global Advisor; Winds of Change*, April 2011 [

⁸⁷ IPSOS-MORI, “Military Action in Libya”, 12 April 2011 [accessed on 28 April 2011 at www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2763/ReutersIpsos-MORI-International-poll-on-Libya.aspx].

⁸⁸ See Ben Lombardi, “Why Germany chose to abstain?”, *DRDC CORA Letter Report LR 2011-038*, April 2011.

⁸⁹ “Libyen: Mehrheit der Deutschen befürwortet Luftangriffe”, *Focus*, 20 März 2011.

Interestingly, governments in NATO-Europe were very careful to emphasise the humanitarian aspect of the mission, reinforcing (perhaps intentionally) the source of legitimacy identified in 1999. Indeed, from the outset, the Libyan mission was officially described in terms of humanitarian relief and civilian protection. France's foreign minister, Alain Juppé, justified his country's position during the debate on Resolution 1973 by noting the need to uphold universal values:

Despite these calls for peace, the situation in Libya today is more alarming than ever. As I speak, Colonel Al-Qadhafi's troops pursue their violent conquest of liberated cities and territories. We must not give free rein to warmongers; we must not abandon civilian populations, the victims of brutal repression, to their fate; we must not allow the rule of law and international morality to be trampled underfoot.⁹⁰

European leaders sought to impress upon listeners the moral urgency of the intervention and, as the mission began to take longer than some expected, underscored its *right-ness*. French president Nicholas Sarkozy, who had earlier in the year underestimated the strength of the opposition that toppled the Tunisian government, aggressively assumed a leadership role in opposing the Libyan regime. And, like British premier David Cameron, he characterised his policy as grounded upon a moral responsibility to a beleaguered people:

We have a duty to respond to this anguished appeal. The Arab people have chosen to liberate themselves from the servitude they have found themselves locked in for too long. These revolutions have made a huge hope grow in the heart of all those who share the values of democracy and human rights.⁹¹

Britain's foreign secretary, William Hague, employed the same language. In a 27 April speech to the House of Commons, he stated that

Britain has continued to take a leading role in international efforts to protect civilians in Libya, and the case for action remains compelling: Gaddafi's regime persists in attacking its own people, wilfully killing its own civilian population.

He commended the British armed forces' participation in the NATO operations that he said had "saved many lives" and noted that "their efforts are essential to bringing a lasting peace and a better future for the Libyan people, who have suffered so much at the hands of this brutal regime."⁹²

From the beginning, however, the humanitarian objectives of the mission were broadly conceived. The removal of the Gadhafi regime was viewed by governments as coincident with the achievement of the mission's objectives as defined by UNSC Res. 1973. In fact, European leaders argued that accomplishing humanitarian goals could not be assured so long as the Libyan leader retains his position. This was made explicit in a 25 March statement issued by the European Council that presented these two otherwise distinct aims -- civilian protection and regime change -- as inextricably linked:

⁹⁰ United Nations Security Council, S/PV.6498, 17 March 2011, p.2.

⁹¹ Angela Charlton, "Europe, not US, pushed for military force in Libya", *Salon Magazine*, 20 March 2011 [accessed at http://mobile.salon.com/news/feature/2011/03/20/europe_libya/index.html].

⁹² UK Parliament, House of Commons, *Hansard*, 26 April 2011, columns 33-34.

In line with UNSCR 1973, the European Union, together with the League of Arab States, the United Nations and the African Union, will intensify its efforts to find a solution to the crisis which responds to the legitimate demands of the Libyan people. The European Council reiterated its call on Colonel Kadhafi to relinquish power immediately in order to allow Libya to rapidly embark on an orderly and Libyan-led transition to democracy through a broad-based dialogue, taking also in consideration the need to ensure Libya's sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁹³

Given the nature of the Gadhafi regime, and the quixotic personality of its leader, the logic of the Council's position was unassailable. However, managing public sentiments sometimes led European governments to downplay and sometimes explicitly deny the much more expansive goal of regime change. In a revealing late-April exchange before a parliamentary committee, the British Defence Secretary, Liam Fox, was clearly unwilling to admit that more than protection of civilians was involved in ongoing operations:

Mrs Moon: You said that it was for the people of Libya to choose their own regime, so is regime change a goal? Is that something that you are actively working towards?

Dr Fox: Regime change is not part of the UN Resolution.

(...)

Mrs Moon: Are we giving mixed messages? I have just looked at the Libya letter from Obama, Cameron and Sarkozy⁹⁴, in which it is suggested that they cannot imagine a future for Libya with Gaddafi in charge. Is that not tantamount to saying that we are looking for regime change?

Dr Fox: The sentence before that makes it very clear. It states, "Our duty and our mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1973 is to protect civilians, and we are doing that. It is not to remove Gaddafi by force. But it is impossible to imagine a future for Libya with Gaddafi in power." That very much echoes the views that have been put forward by the opposition forces themselves.⁹⁵

Charging mixed messages underscores wariness in policy circles of discussing regime change as an objective, for, while Fox's description of the mission is legally precise, it does not capture the entire scale of the ongoing operation. Airstrikes against targets in downtown Tripoli that are far from the zone of actual fighting where civilians are likely to be most in harm's way, do not fit

⁹³ European Council, *EUCO 10/11 Conclusions*, 24/25 March 2011, p. 7.

⁹⁴ The letter being referred to was authored by all three leaders in mid-April. See "The Bombing continues until Gadhafi goes", *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 April 2011. Perhaps the most revealing passage in the letter supporting the claim that regime change is a strategic objective is: "However, so long as Gaddafi is in power, Nato and its coalition partners must maintain their operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds. Then a genuine transition from dictatorship to an inclusive constitutional process can really begin, led by a new generation of leaders. For that transition to succeed, Colonel Gaddafi must go, and go for good."

⁹⁵ UK Parliament, House of Commons, *Oral Evidence taken before the Defence Committee, Operations in Libya*, 27 April 2011 [accessed on 25 May 2011 at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmdfence/c950-i/c95001.htm].

well with an exclusive humanitarian focus: nor do threats by allied leaders to “get” Gadhafi or to intensify the air attacks until the Libyan leader steps aside.⁹⁶ If protecting civilians from the depredations of the Gadhafi regime was a core mission objective, so too, it would seem given NATO’s actions, was that regime’s removal.

What seems likely is that in the wake of the US war in Iraq any explicit mention of regime change as a strategic aim is perceived by European leaders as politically toxic. But is that justified? Just as the “body-bag syndrome” may well have been exaggerated at the time of the Kosovo war, the belief that European publics will not support the forceful removal of Gadhafi is possibly unwarranted. Given his behaviour over several decades, including the support of terrorist groups active in Europe, European publics were very familiar with his regime and the type of challenge that it posed to peace and stability. And, in fact, Gadhafi openly threatened to impose costs on his “European friends” whose actions in supporting the intervention “have damaged and endangered a series of major accords on security that were in their interests and the economic cooperation that we had.”⁹⁷ Removal of such a leader might, in the eyes of many people, constitute a humanitarian objective. It was perhaps no surprise therefore that the April 2011 IPSOS-MORI poll showed that respondents in Great Britain, France, and Italy supported regime change by wide margins: in Great Britain (63 percent), France (67 percent) and Italy (76 percent). Contrary to those who believe that the European publics differ significantly from the US public, it is very noteworthy that a comparable proportion of Americans (71 percent) surveyed in the same poll supported an allied intervention to remove Gadhafi.

Does this poll indicate that public opinion in Britain, France and Italy was firmly behind the NATO-led intervention in Libya? That conclusion cannot be derived from the data. It does, however, demonstrate that the assumption that Europeans are resolutely opposed to the use of military force is incorrect. There are occasions when European publics are prepared to be supportive of more forceful policies, most especially in the defence of values that are viewed as fundamental – or in opposition to regimes that have a reputation of frequently violating them. And this support can persist even when a mission is not proceeding as quickly as planners or commentators would expect. When asked whether the military mission is “effective in protecting Libyan civilians”, the core objective of the intervention, the IPSOS Mori poll revealed publics that were largely divided at the time: in Britain, France and Italy, only 52, 53 and 44 percent respectively believe that to be true.

⁹⁶ See Robert Winnett, “Liam Fox says it is inevitable allied forces will ‘get’ Gadaffi”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 2011. See also Heather Langan and Ben Holland, “NATO extends Libya mission after vowing to intensify attacks”, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 June 2011.

⁹⁷ “Gaddafi says European Friends Betrayed Him”, *Reuters*, 15 March 2011.

When that poll was conducted in mid-April 2011, European publics were noticeably unconvinced that the Alliance had clearly established objectives “for the military action in Libya”. While this is surprising given the coalition’s emphasis on humanitarian objectives, this finding might have been a consequence of the lack of public knowledge about what was happening on the ground in Libya, where initial reporting was unclear as to the composition and aims of the rebel alliance opposing Gadhafi. An awareness of Europe’s dependence on Libyan oil imports alongside the issue of regime change might also have obscured the specific appeal of the humanitarian motives that characterised many statements of Western leaders. Many of those surveyed in Europe were also less than certain that the outcome would achieve what the Western Powers desired. While those who believed Gadhafi would retain power were only a small minority, opinion was seriously divided as to whether the end-state would produce a democratic government or lead to a stalemate. In Britain a small plurality (31 percent) believed a stalemate would occur, over those who did not know (30 percent). In France, opinion was almost evenly split among the three outcomes. In Italy, 55 percent saw a stalemate as the most likely outcome versus 34 percent for a new democratic regime in Libya. With no other evidence available, the latter two positions might have been a reflection of what had happened in other recent Western interventions in the Islamic world – Iraq and Afghanistan – where former repugnant regimes have been replaced by a form of traditionally corrupt authoritarian rule.

Figure 2
Support for Intervention: Comparison of Survey Results, April & May 2011*

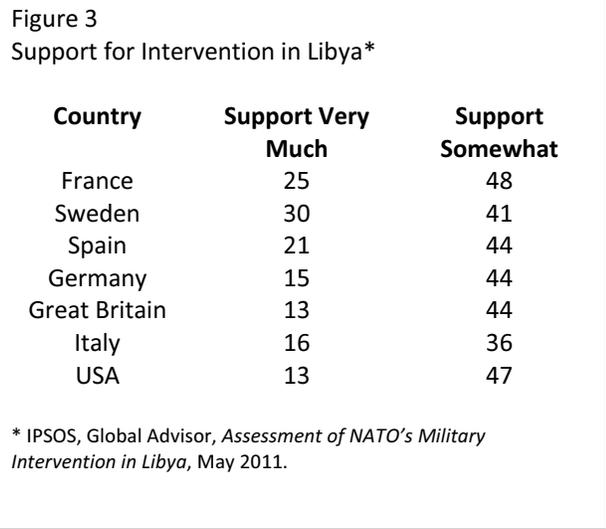
Country	April	May
France	63	73
Germany	n.a.	59
Great Britain	50	57
Italy	40	52
USA	55	60

* Results taken from IPSOS-MORI, “Military Action in Libya”, 12 April 2011 and IPSOS, Global Advisor, *Assessment of NATO’s Military Intervention in Libya*, May 2011.

In early-May, IPSOS Global Advisor published responses to a global opinion survey entitled “Assessment of NATO’s Military Intervention in Libya”.⁹⁸ Despite the fact that the mission had not yet achieved its objectives, and that NATO-Europe’s leaders had originally stated that the mission would take weeks rather than months, the findings reveal that support for the military intervention had increased in France, Great Britain, Italy and Germany, with clear majorities in favour of the mission in Libya. (A comparison of the findings from the two IPSOS surveys – April and May – can be found in Figure 2.) One can hypothesise that a possible reason for the jump in support could be the “rally ‘round the flag” phenomenon that Everts observed in his earlier studies of Kosovo. While the poll did not ask if respondents supported their countries’ participation in the intervention, in the case of France, Great Britain and Italy, it is reasonable to assume that the responses also endorse their government’s position. In the case of Germany, where the government of Angela Merkel chose not to participate, the findings of the May 2011 survey are consistent with other polling results cited earlier. Prior to the March 15 vote on UNSC Resolution 1973, a majority of Germans surveyed supported the mandate of the military intervention, but an equal sized majority opposed their country’s participation.

⁹⁸ IPSOS, Global Advisor, *Assessment of NATO’s Military Intervention in Libya*, May 2011 [accessed on 3 June 2011 at www.ipsos-na.com/knowledge-ideas/public-affairs/ipsos-global-advisory/?q=nato-military-intervention-in-libya].

Unfortunately, the May 2011 poll was very narrowly focussed. Probably as a result of the fact that its international sample included a number of non-European, non-NATO countries, the survey did not probe into attitudes regarding the mission’s effectiveness or the issue of casualties. It did not ask about the commitment of ground forces. As in public perceptions of the Kosovo War, that would represent a significant intensification of the military effort and would likely lead to military casualties. Given this poll and that conducted in April 2011, one is unable to gauge what the European publics’ tolerance would be for military casualties at that point in the operation. As with polling conducted at the time of the Kosovo War, we are left to speculate about the correlation (if any) between public support in Europe (and elsewhere) for a mission that was obviously regarded as legitimate and the human cost to national armed forces.



With regard to the general assumption – the Kagan thesis – that Europeans are less willing to countenance the use of military force, it is noteworthy that there was little evidence in either the April or May IPSOS polls of a significant difference in support for the Libyan mission in Europe and the US. While US public support (at 60 percent) was generally greater than that of Italy, Great Britain and Germany, it was noticeably less than the public support in France, Sweden and Spain (see Figure 3). And, if one only looks at the response of those who “support very much” the intervention, US support (13 percent) is equivalent to that in Great Britain, but less than in Germany (15 percent), Italy (16 percent), Spain (21 percent), and considerably less than in France (25 percent) and Sweden (30 percent). As in the case of Kosovo, these findings suggest that European publics are, in principle, no less willing to support the use of military power in certain kinds of out-of-area missions than their American counterparts.

6 General Conclusions

That public opinion exists in contemporary politics is a truism for, as J.A.W. Gunn reminds us “to have opinions is a universal trait of humanity and to contemplate the opinions of that body sometimes called the “public” is scarcely less commonplace.”⁹⁹ However, as Gunn and others have long observed, public opinion is an extremely inaccurate description of the views held by people generally. Fear of social isolation and an impetus toward conformity have been identified as factors influencing what is revealed by surveys as public opinion. But it is important to note that public opinion on any issue is the product of a multitude of influences, some known, some not, many seemingly unrelated to the subject of the survey. Is support for military intervention the result of a deeply held or carefully considered opinion?: is it an endorsement of a particular leader or political party?: is it a demonstration of patriotic support for troops in the field? One can never be certain of the answer. And yet, however unsatisfying, there are few other means to assess the sentiments of broad swathes of a polity’s inhabitants on specific issues – important or otherwise -- save by opinion surveys.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps even more valuable, public opinion surveys allow researchers to test assumptions against evidence gathered by people whose results can be examined and analysed. If people can be encouraged to express their opinions freely in the polling process, the conclusions are more evidence based.

This paper had two purposes. The first was to examine the general attitude in Europe toward expeditionary military (i.e., out-of-area) missions. The second was to probe more deeply in to the widely held assumption that European publics are less supportive of the use of military force than their American counterparts. Focussing on two comparable cases – Kosovo (1999) and the operation in Libya – permitted a study of military missions that are/have been of similar duration and defined by a similar purpose, namely humanitarian relief. With regard to Kosovo, the unexpected length of the mission and the widely-held view that the military campaign was proving itself ineffective does not seem to have had a negative impact on that public support. Instead, the legitimacy of the mission – protecting civilians from the excesses of an authoritarian regime – was sufficient for the publics of most major European states. The evidence from polling of the body-bag syndrome was inconclusive, although there is some evidence (again from surveys) that the public was prepared for casualties. That attitude is, as one study showed, entirely dependent on the purpose for which the military was employed: and, in that study, the objective of providing humanitarian relief provided a cushion of support for such operations.

As the paper has acknowledged, the discussion of the body-bag syndrome is necessarily hypothetical. Neither the Kosovo War nor the current Libyan intervention has had to confront large numbers of military casualties. Survey results clearly show that casualties are an issue of concern, but it is unclear to what degree. Obviously, European publics would prefer that casualties be minimal, and that undoubtedly affects government thinking in launching military operations, but polling so far available on the subject suggests that it is far from decisive in determining the level of public support. That conclusion is little more than a hypothesis, and

⁹⁹ J.A.W. Gunn, “Public opinion”, Terrence Ball, James Farr and Russell L. Hanson (eds.), *Political innovation and conceptual change* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 247.

¹⁰⁰ Elections are, of course, another such mechanism. However, they tend to capture public sentiments over a broad range of public issues.

leaves open the prospect that public support for “wars of choice” could nosedive – as was implied when, in 1999, pollsters asked about the use of ground forces -- should that ever happen.

Interestingly, the results of polling revealed high levels of public support for the Kosovo and Libyan operations on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, generally speaking, European publics, even those in countries not contributing forces, have tended to be more supportive of the military intervention than that in the US. That finding does not, however, obviate the concern that Europeans are less inclined to support the use of armed force. Indeed, the polling results cited above seem to show that, conceptually, and when asked with regard to specific cases (e.g., Iran), European publics have a higher level of unease about the military instrument of state power than does the American public. They are prepared on occasion to countenance its use, but Europeans much prefer non-violent and non-coercive approaches to conflict resolution. And, as the findings from Transatlantic Trends 2011 reveal, European leaders are even more inclined to that approach. This is, of course, consistent with Robert Cooper’s concept of the post-modern state that he largely identifies with the members of the EU, as well as much of the writing that supports the view that there is a significant trans-Atlantic divide on the issue. That does not mean that European publics will not endorse and support the use of force – both Kosovo and Libya show such an assumption to be incorrect – but they are openly uncomfortable about doing so.

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This Technical Memorandum explores the relationship between public opinion in NATO-Europe and the use of military force. It examines the widely-held assumption that Europeans are, in principle, opposed to the use of military power as an instrument of foreign policy. By reviewing polling data from the time of the Kosovo War (1999) and the ongoing mission in Libya, the paper reveals that there is considerable support for such operations if they are regarded as legitimate. The fear of casualties (i.e., “the body-bag syndrome”) might also play a role, although the discussion is hypothetical given the minimal losses suffered by the Western Powers during the missions in Kosovo and, to date, in Libya.

Ce document technique explore les liens entre l’opinion publique dans les pays européens membres de l’OTAN et le recours à la force militaire. Il examine la croyance fortement répandue selon laquelle les Européens s’opposent, en principe, à l’usage de la puissance militaire comme moyen d’application de la politique étrangère. Suite à l’examen des résultats de sondages effectués à l’époque de la guerre du Kosovo (1999) et de ceux qui ont été exécutés à l’égard de la mission actuellement en cours en Libye, le document révèle que ce genre d’opération bénéficie d’un appui considérable si elle jugée légitime. La crainte de subir des pertes (soit le « syndrome de la housse mortuaire ») pourrait également avoir un rôle à jouer, bien que cette question soit hypothétique étant donné les faibles pertes subies par les puissances occidentales pendant les missions menées au Kosovo et, à ce jour, en Libye.

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