

## **The EU Common Foreign Policy in the Persian Gulf Region: the Kuwait Crisis of 1990-91**

**Mohsen Mirdamadi<sup>1</sup>**

Received: 9/12/2005

Accept: 21/5/2006

### **Abstract**

Foreign policy cooperation and coordination among the European Community member states and presenting Europe with a single voice, has long been an important challenge within the European Community/European Union, especially since early 1970s. In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, there was a general speculation in Europe that the EC may be able to play a new role in international system and fill the vacuum created by the Soviet Union. The Kuwait crisis, in the wake of Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, was the first test for the European ambitions in the post-cold war era. Many European leaders saw it as an opportunity to present a European initiative and play an effective role towards the crisis. Then, the first reactions of the EC, unprecedentedly, were quick and unanimous. This unanimity continued during the first phase of the crisis, when the counter-measures to the crisis were mainly economic and to a lesser extent political. But with the appearance of the military dimension of the crisis, the EC was no longer able to maintain unanimous stand and the member states were divided into two camps: Atlanticists and Europeanists. Britain, occasionally supported by Denmark and Netherlands, sided with the US which pursued a military solution to the crisis. While the Franco-German axe, followed by the rest of member states, preferred a diplomatic solution to the crisis in a longer span. As far as the military operation seemed imminent, the division became deeper. In practice, when military operation began, the Europeans have no choice except to follow the American lead.

These developments were influential on formation of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) as the second pillar of the EU in Maastricht in 1992.

**Keywords:** European Community (EC), European Union (EU), Kuwait Crisis, Persian Gulf.

---

<sup>1</sup>A member of Academic board of Law and Political Science College, University of Tehran

## **Introduction**

Rapid and profound developments in the political map of Europe, during the late 1980s and early 1990s deeply changed the global architecture and the dynamics of international relations. These momentous events which were appropriately termed by Jacques Delors as the 'acceleration of history', revived the discussion about Europe's role in world affairs. The coincidence of the Kuwait crisis of 1990-91 with this transformation in the international system and the subsequent failure of Europe to respond effectively highlighted the shortcomings of the European Community's common foreign policy. These circumstances strengthened the incentives for seeking a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which became a part of the Treaty signed in Maastricht, in December 1991, and became effective in November 1993. The CFSP, however, should be regarded as a stage in more than two decades of a gradual evolution of European Political Cooperation (EPC) with successes and failures, experienced in the different parts of the world.

One of the main regions, and perhaps the most complicated one, in which EPC was involved from its inception, was the Middle East. The Arab-Israeli dispute and developments in the Persian Gulf region were focal points for European attention.

This study aims to evaluate the foreign policy of the EC with particular reference to the Persian Gulf region during the Kuwait Crisis, and attempts to explain the European policies at two levels: the level of the EC/EPC, and the level of individual member states. Changing the level of analysis to the national actors, as David Singer observed, permits one to

examine the actors in a greater detail and differentiate among them (Knorr and Verba, 1961: 82). The aim is to evaluate the degree of convergence or divergence among the member states and the interaction between national and collective policies. The Persian Gulf here is viewed as the object of the European policies. It is also aimed to understand the dynamics, that determine the developments of the European Community foreign policy in the Persian Gulf region. It is hoped that this study offer some broader insight into the cooperative and conflictual areas of European interests and policies and its implications on the development of a common European foreign policy which could determine the role of Europe in the international system.

## **Historical Developments of EPC**

Although the competence of the Communities was limited to economic integration among the member states, for their founders it was only the beginning of a long process with the eventual objective being the political union of Europe. Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the European Community, stated that '... the Community we have created is not an end in itself. It is a process of change .... I have never doubted that one day this process will lead us to the United States of Europe'. (Holland, 1993: 60). This perspective led to the ill-fated early attempts to establish a European Defence Community and a European Political Community in the 1950s and the Fouchet Plans on political cooperation in the 1960s (Nuttall, 1992: 33-46).

However, the idea that some kind of foreign policy making machinery would be a supplement to

the European Economic identity was not abandoned. Given the previously unsuccessful experience, the six founding member states launched a fairly modest initiative in the late 1960s to establish European political cooperation as an intergovernmental machinery with a non-binding character outside the Community framework. The heads of state and government of the member states at the Hague Conference, on December 1 & 2 1969, instructed the foreign ministers 'to study the best way of achieving progress in the matter of political unification, within the context of enlargement' and expressed their determination to pave 'the way for a united Europe, capable of assuming its responsibilities in the world of tomorrow and of making a contribution commensurate with its traditions and mission' (Bulletin of the EC, 1970: 9). As observed, the decision to launch political cooperation was made in a period of relative success, as the community had agreed upon the completion of the common market and the establishment of the economic and monetary union. The heads of states and governments believed that such achievements in the economic sphere were to be supplemented by fostering political unification. Another factor which may be regarded as an impetus for political cooperation was the decolonization process which profoundly changed the balance of power in the international system and made western Europe exposed to external challenges (A Pijpers *et al*, 1988: 6). This strategic consideration was later, outlined in the 'Declaration on European Identity' as follows:

'Although in the past, the European countries were individually able to play a

major role on the international scene, present international problems are difficult for any of the nine to solve alone. International developments and the growing concentration of power and responsibility in the hands of a very small number of great powers mean that Europe must unite and speak increasingly with a single voice if it wanted to make itself heard and play its proper role in the world' (Bulletin of the EC, 12-1973: 120).

The outcome of the ministerial consultation, following the Hague summit, was the Luxembourg Report (or Davignon Report) of October 1970, upon which the foreign policy cooperation was based which had two objectives:

- 'a- To ensure greater mutual understanding with respect to the major issues of international politics, by exchanging information and consulting regularly;
- b- to increase their solidarity by working for a harmonization of views, concertation of attitudes and joint action when it appears feasible and desirable' (Bulletin of the EC, 11-1970: 11).

From the beginning of EPC, the Middle East was one of the main issues on its agenda, but given the widely diverging views of the member states, the debate on the Middle East conflict during the early years of political cooperation was not promising. The inability of the political machinery to bring the member states to a compromise formula caused considerable disarray both within the Nine and with

their major ally, the United States, after the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 and ensuing energy crisis. The energy crisis, however, involved the political machinery closely in Middle Eastern politics in the coming years.

A new initiative to promote the political cooperation was launched by the Copenhagen Report on political cooperation in 1973. This Report, *inter alia*, expressed:

‘... the conviction that Europe must be able to make its voice heard in world affairs and to affirm its own views in international relations.

Europe now needs to establish its position in the world as a *distinct entity*, especially in international negotiations which are likely to have a decisive influence on the international equilibrium and on the future of the European Community’. And that ‘cooperation among the Nine on foreign policy should be such as to enable Europe to make an original contribution to the international equilibrium’ (Bulletin of the EC, 9-1973: 15).

By this arrangement, the member states agreed not to take a final position on important foreign policy questions without prior consultation with their partners within the framework of EPC. In addition, a communication system (COREU) between the foreign ministries was to be established, and a mechanism for cooperation among the embassies and offices of permanent representatives of the Nine in their capitals, third countries and international organisations were agreed upon. The Copenhagen Report, thus, was seen as a cautious step forward in

the uneven pathway of EPC developments.

EPC activities from Autumn 1973 were largely characterised by close involvement in Middle Eastern politics, and increased tension with the United States, as a result. Indeed, one of the philosophies behind the establishment of EPC was to assert Europe’s independence (of the United States) in world affairs (Smith, 1995: 33-34). The European ‘distinct entity’ which was emphasised by the Nine in the Copenhagen Report, in fact, envisaged a distinction from the US. This assertiveness was highlighted during the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 and the ensuing energy crisis brought to enormous tension between Europe and the US which continued, to a greater or lesser extent, in the following years.

During 1974 and 1980, EPC was able to provide a relatively workable framework for foreign policy cooperation over the Middle East conflict and succeeded in bringing about the convergence of widely diverging views of the member states. This gradual evolution of European policies reached its peak in the Venice Declaration of June 1980.

However, the record of EPC in other developments in the region, such as Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, and the American hostage crisis in Tehran in 1979-80, proved problematic. In both instances, differences emerged both among the Nine and between the Nine and the United States (Nuttall, 1992: 154-58 and 168-71). Shortcomings of the EPC combined with increasing concerns over the revival of East-West tension by President Reagan’s hard line towards the Soviet Union, in the early 1980s, created a stimulus to the member states to agree on a third report, the London Report, in October 1981 which provided guidelines for political cooperation

until 1987 when the Single European Act (SEA) came to force. According to the London Report:

'The Foreign Ministers believe that in a period of increased world tension and uncertainty the need for a coherent and united approach to international affairs by the members of the European community is greater than ever. They note that, in spite of what has been achieved, the Ten are still far from playing a role in the world appropriate to their combined influence. It is their conviction that the Ten should seek increasingly to *shape events and not merely to react to them*.' (Bulletin of the EC, Supplement 3/81, 10-1981, p.14).

This report also recognised, *inter alia*, a crisis procedure through which a ministerial or political directors' meeting could be convened within forty eight hours in times of emergency. The Single European Act which was signed in February 1986 by the then twelve member states and came into force in July 1987, formalised the EPC procedures in the treaty and reduced the distinction between EPC and the EC. Under the provisions of the Act, a permanent EPC secretariat was also to be established in Brussels, and the EPC emphasis moved from consultation among the member states to a more outward looking one seeking to promote European interests in the world (Pijpers *et al*, 1988: 119-20). Arguably, EPC gradually became an indispensable factor in the member states' foreign policy.

However, the main shortcomings of the political machinery still remained unchanged. One of these shortcomings, and perhaps the most important, was the intergovernmental character of EPC which left ultimate

control of foreign policy in the hands of national governments. So, while the EPC machinery provided an additional information, communication system, and diplomatic framework to national foreign policies, their commitments to EPC were mainly based on 'voluntarism' rather than any binding obligation (Pijpers, 1992: 240). As Christopher Hill puts it, 'individual member states will always look upon it [EPC] as a means of promoting their own particular concerns', and 'if national goals are the ultimate rationale of participating in EPC, the promotion of a proper common foreign policy would be self defeating...' (Hill, 1983: 23).

The Iran-Iraq war was a case in point. During much of the 1980s when the war between the two sides was continuing, despite the strategic sensitivity of the region and potentially serious consequences for the community especially in terms of energy, the political machinery was rather ineffective. The only attempt the Ten/Twelve made was to issue a few very generally-worded declarations asking for an end to these hostilities. The ultimate reaction to the war, therefore, was left to the member states which followed their own perceived national interests. Then, despite the declared UN policy of banning sales of arms to the belligerent states, the French from the early days of the war, sided with Iraq and provided Saddam Hussein with the most sophisticated French arms<sup>1</sup>. The British also supported, but to a lesser extent, Iraq. Germany although tried to show a more balanced relations with

1. France in 1983 lent five "Super Etandard" aircraft together with the advanced Exocet missiles to Iraq, which mainly used to attack civilian targets.

Iran and Iraq, it played the main role behind the Iraqi chemical weapons.

Lack of any harmonisation in views and policies, in the 1980s, over an area of Europe's strategic interests and almost constant instability, left the Europe completely unprepared when they had to face the Kuwait crisis in 1990. As a result, there was little difference from the energy crisis of 1973, the Twelve were divided and their political machinery failed to formulate and implement any effective common response. Views expressed, focussing particularly on the lack of a military arm to the Community which seemed to be a necessary instrument for responding such a crisis. This experience, combined with the wish on the part of Europe to play a greater role in the emerging new world order, resulted in the inclusion of CFSP in the Maastricht Treaty, upon which the member states were committed to 'define and implement a common foreign and security policy ... including eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence' (Treaty on European Union, Articles J.1.1, and J.4.1). This optimism that had characterized the immediate post-Cold War era, however, as observed by David Allen, seemed to be relevant only in the short term (Hill, 1996: 292). The CFSP, in practice, brought very limited change to the European foreign policy complex (Regelsberger *et al*, 1997: vii), and the traditional patterns of behaviour and shortcomings of EPC remained largely unchanged. The failure of the Twelve to respond effectively to the crisis in the former Yugoslavia during 1991-95

highlighted the deficiencies of the new arrangement under the Maastricht Treaty. In the Persian Gulf also no common foreign policy has emerged and the CFSP has been content with only some occasional responses to isolated events in the region. What has so far been the case in the Persian Gulf was an 'occasional coincidence' of national foreign policies of the Community (Union) member states in the region which is far from being a common foreign policy. In addition, the old deficiency of EPC seems still to be in place, particularly in the Persian Gulf region, that 'the Nine [now twenty five] have responded to the events rather than anticipating or attempting positively to shape them. They have been concerned defensively to limit the damage to European interests which a disunited posture might threaten, ... rather than actively to attempt to exploit opportunities themselves ...' (Burrows *et al*, 1978: 177). So, under the arrangements of CFSP, few evidence exists to warrant the expectation of a common European foreign policy in the Persian Gulf.

### **Europe and the Kuwait Crisis**

Europe internationally faced the Kuwait crisis different from those of the energy crisis of 1973-74 or the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88. At the time of Iraqi invasion the old bi-polar system had virtually come to its end, Europe no longer remained divided, and the two parts of Germany were proceeding to the final stage of unification.

Towards the end of the 1980s the European community seemed more assertively, inclined to 'spill over' into the areas of 'high politics'. During this decade, the European parliament ratified the 'Draft

Treaty on European Union' and end of the Cold War gave a new momentum to European assertiveness towards politicization of the Community. Indeed, there was an opinion that the Community might be able to assume a new role in the international system, commensurate with its economic role and fill the vacuum created by the disappearance of the Soviet Union. The Dublin Summit of June 1990 decided to convene an intergovernmental conference on political union by the end of that year which eventually resulted in inclusion of the 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' (CFSP) as one of the pillars of the Maastricht Treaty. The envisaged CFSP was, indeed, the EC response to the profound upheavals in Europe and in the old world order. The new assertiveness of the community was also reinforced by the expectations of the outsiders. However, as we have seen, there was a marked 'capability-expectation gap' in response to the changing circumstances (Bulmer *et al*, 1994: 103-129).

The invasion of Kuwait was the first crisis following the end of the Cold War and it challenged this new European assertiveness. The invasion was considered as seriously affecting the future of oil supplies to Europe and, if successful by retained, Iraq would have become a giant producer in OPEC, controlling 20 percent of the world oil reserves, with a potential for stranglehold on the world economy. In this event, Iraq would have been able to extend its imperium to the whole of the Arab peninsula where important European interests lay (Dannreuther, 1991-92: 24). Such a situation in which the oil policies of key producing states could be substantially directed by an intractable regime was threatening for Europe

and the industrialized world as a whole. This perspective motivated European states to counter the invasion, both individually and collectively.

This work aims to evaluate the performance of the Europeans, both at the collective and individual levels, in response to the Kuwait crisis and its achievement for a common European foreign and security policy. The main questions that this study attempts to answer, therefore, are:

*a- To what extent did the new international circumstances affect the Community in the formulation and implementation of a common policy vis-a-vis the crisis?*

*b- Did the old differing national policies of the member states towards the Gulf converge in the post-Cold War era?*

*c- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Community in the challenge posed by the crisis?*

As is argued in the following discussion, Europe faced several constraints in responding to this crisis. The crisis, indeed, had economic, political, and military dimensions but the military aspect rapidly outweighed the economic and political dimensions. The Community, while prepared and experienced in dealing with the economic aspects of a crisis, was not so prepared in the political or, more importantly, the military sphere. The proposed common foreign and security policy was still under discussion and the Community had not had a bright record in these fields. As a result, in the first phase of the crisis when the effectiveness of an economic solution seemed more likely, responding to the crisis was less problematic for the Community. But during the second phase of the crisis when the likelihood of a military solution increased, the formulation of a common

policy became increasingly more difficult and implementation of a common policy then became almost impossible. Another problem for Europeans was their close relationship with the Arab countries in general and with Iraq in particular. Europe, therefore, preferred to act more cautiously and seek a peaceful solution to the crisis. But the United States, which was leading anti-Iraq campaign, was backed by Britain. This gradually became a source of tension between the two sides of the Atlantic, and by distancing themselves from the Anglo-American stance, most Europeans wished to avoid being seen as part of an American crusade against the Arab World. Dumas and Genscher, the foreign ministers of France and Germany, were the most reluctant to follow the Americans (Barzilai *et al*, 1993: 219).

Therefore, in this first test in the post-Cold War era, their old differences again divided the Europeans. Britain and to a lesser extent the Netherlands sided with the US and a majority of the Community member states led by France sought to play an independent role but lacked any effective instrument to do so. This lack of collective effectiveness allowed the individual national policies to prevail and by the outbreak of the military operation, in mid January 1991, any distinct European role ceased to exist. They had no choice but to accept American leadership and join the operation under American command. However, unlike Iran-Iraq war, European institutions this time were unprecedentedly active in responding to the crisis.

### **Performance of EC and EPC**

Unlike previous crises such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Kuwait crisis broke out at a time when the European community did not have any

major difficulty, at least in the first weeks of the crisis, in terms of becoming actively involved in it. Contrary to previous crises, Iraq was not supported by a superpower, nor even a great power, and its attempt rather was globally condemned. Perhaps for the first time, there was no effective opposition to the Western powers in the UN Security Council. For Europe, which played only a secondary role during cold War on a world chessboard dominated by the two superpowers, the latest crisis provided a unique opportunity to emerge as an independent international actor and to gain a credible position in the emerging world order. In other words, the failure of the EC to assume an active role vis-a-vis the crisis could have led to a subordinated role for Europe over the longer period. It is not surprising, thus, that the initial reaction of the EC/EPC was quick, active and unanimous. During the first weeks of the crisis, in spite of the existence of variations at the national level, the European institutions, like the EC, EPC and, later, WEU were unexpectedly coherent. On the day of the invasion, the Twelve condemned the Iraqi attempt, a promptness that stood out in sharp contrast to the then Nine's three week delay in reacting to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan a decade Earlier (Cromwell, 1992-3: 126). EPC in its statement of 2 August, declared that:

'The Community and its member states strongly condemn the use of force by a member state of the UN against the territorial integrity of another state; this constitutes a breach of the UN charter and an unacceptable means to solve international differences. They therefore fully support the resolution adopted



today by the Security Council. The Community and its member states call upon all governments to condemn this unjustified use of force....' (Bulletin of the EC, 7/8-1990: 121).

Two days after the invasion, on the 4th of August meeting in Rome, EPC issued a joint-statement and declared that:

'The Community and its member states reiterate their unreserved condemnation of the brutal Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and their demand for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from the territory of Kuwait, already expressed in their statement of 2 August... . As of now the Community decided to adopt the following:

- i- an embargo on oil imports from Iraq and Kuwait;
- ii- appropriate measures aimed to freezing Iraqi assets in the territory of the member states;
- iii- an embargo on the sales of arms and other military equipments to Iraq;
- vi- the suspension of any cooperation in the military sphere with Iraq;
- v- the suspension of technical and scientific cooperation with Iraq;
- vi- the suspension of cooperation to Iraq of the system of generalized preference.' (Ibid: 122)

Consultations within the EC increased as the crisis intensified and on August 10, a joint ministerial meeting of NATO and EPC was held in Brussels in order to coordinate the measures taken by the two

organisations. There, the Twelve stated that 'they rejected the announced annexation of Kuwait which is contrary to international law and therefore null and void,... . The same applies to the announced removal of diplomatic missions from Kuwait...'. A similar joint ministerial meeting between the EPC and WEU was also held in Paris, on August 21. In their joint statement, issued by EPC, they condemned the Iraqi measures against western citizens and refused to close their diplomatic missions in Kuwait (Ibid, p. 123-4). Furthermore, the Twelve's Foreign Ministers held an extraordinary meeting on September 7 and agreed to provide aid for repatriation of refugees and also to the countries most affected by the crisis, notably Egypt, Jordan and Turkey (Bulletin of the EC, 9-1990: 79).

On September 17 the Community Foreign Ministers examined the *ecu* 1.5 billion urgent assistance to the countries seriously affected by the crisis. Moreover, the European Council in its meeting on October 27 and 28 in Rome reiterated the demand for the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait.

In their Declaration on the crisis they declared:

'The European Council ... condemned the Iraqi practice of holding foreign nationals as hostages and keeping some of them in strategic sites... .

They confirmed their determination not to send representatives of their governments in any capacity to negotiate with Iraq for release of foreign hostages and to discourage others from doing so.' (Bulletin of the EC, 10-1990: 12).

Following the statement of August 4, the

Commission proposed a ban on oil and refined products of Iraq and Kuwait being imported into the Community's territory. On August 8, the Council in implementing the embargo against Iraq, prohibited all Community trade with Iraq and Kuwait, except products intended for humanitarian use (Bulletin of the EC, 7/8-1990: 97). Further more, in order to enforce the embargo, apart from Britain and France whose naval forces were already patrolling the area, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Spain agreed to send warships to the region.

In assessing the European Community's measures in these early stages it could be said that the Twelve responded to the crisis, timely and effectively. The official distinction between the EC and EPC during the crisis was increasingly ignored. The EC and EPC were, therefore, able to function, to use the words of the Commission, as "a single Community instrument" with political and economic measures fully harmonised. In addition, the WEU took military action according to EPC recommendations (Ibid, p. 155). De Michelis, the Italian Foreign Minister, and the then president of the Council, stated that the EC reacted to the crisis effectively and with clarity of intentions and decisions. He asserted that the intensity of the Twelve's collaboration, during the crisis, had been a real start for building the political union in Europe and that it had been light years ahead of any of its previous reactions to major international crises both in speed and content (International Herald Tribune, 1-2 Sep 1990). American officials were also impressed by Europe's apparent unity (Ibid, 10 August 1990).

But as the events that followed demonstrated that

these assessments were premature. As the crisis continued and the probability of a military conflict increased, disagreement within the Community grew, as well. Initially they showed a high degree of cohesion but following the Security Council resolution 678 of November 29 which authorized the member states to cooperate with Kuwait to use "all necessary means" to implement the Security Council resolutions, the crisis entered its second phase with the prospect of a massive military confrontation. This transition to actual war changed the apparent unanimity within the Community and a number of divergences arose amongst the European countries, in the handling of the Persian Gulf crisis (Gnesotto, and Roper, 1992: 2).

The cause of these divergences at this stage can be sought mainly in the differing national policies rather than by looking at institutional inefficiencies. The roots of emerging differences within the Community could be assigned to three interrelated areas, almost similar to the differences during energy crisis of 1973-74:

- 1- Relations with Arab states which emerged as the linkage issue.
- 2- Europe's political identity and its role in the international arena.
- 3- The Euro-American relationship.

The European Community and its member states during the 1970s and 1980s had continuously expanded their ties with the Arab states, as manifested in the Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Venice Declaration, EC-GCC relations, and the support Iraq and Persian Gulf states had received during the Iran-Iraq war. Given such a background, the Community

initially expressed hope of an Arab solution and offered its assistance through the Euro-Arab dialogue to prevent the crisis being seen as a confrontation between the West and the Arab-Muslim world (Freedman, 1990: 66)<sup>1</sup>. Following this, EPC decided to improve relations with Iran and Syria. To highlight its pro-Arab orientation, the Community also decided to revive the EC-GCC dialogue which was halted prior to the outbreak of the crisis.

At the same time, due to its close relationship with Iraq, France, as the pioneer but supported by a majority of the member states including Germany, Italy and Spain, sought a peaceful end to the crisis. France in particular insisted, first, on giving more time for economic sanctions to take effect and, second, sought to give a face-saving opportunity to Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait (Ibid: 171). It was in this regard that the French proposed to link Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait with the establishment of an international peace conference on the Arab-Israeli conflict. For this approach a peaceful solution which also upheld the member states' interests in Iraq would have been an ideal end to the crisis. This approach was, however, opposed by the Anglo-American position which insisted on the unconditional withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait and rejected anything which could be regarded as a prize for the aggressor.

Differences in the Community over its role in the

1. According to Freedman, De Michelis was told, in October, by Arab foreign ministers in New York, during the UN General Assembly meeting that such an initiative would only highlight the Arab disunity over the crisis.

international arena, independent of the United States were as old as the energy crisis of 1973. Differing views among the member states on these key questions overshadowed the EC discussions during the few weeks prior to the outbreak of the war. As a result of failure to respond to these questions jointly, 'the Community became a house divided: an 'Atlanticist' minority, primarily the British and Dutch, standing behind the Americans, and a 'Europeanist' majority desperately seeking a peaceful solution' (Rummel, 1992: 159). The Europeanists insisted on an independent role for the Twelve. This independent approach was followed, in December, by France, Germany and Italy who insisted on initiating an EC mission. The American proposal of November 30 for direct talks with Iraq, on which its European allies had not been consulted, was seized on by the Europeans as confirming their right to move forward independently. The Europeanists' endeavour led to the decision of the European Council in mid December to welcome the Bush offer for direct talks between the United States and Iraq and it was declared that: 'The European Community and its member states underline the value of a contact between the presidency and the Foreign Minister of Iraq...' (Bulletin of the EC, 12-1990: 15). Gianni De Michelis, then the outgoing president of the Council declared that 'if by the end of the year direct talks between Washington and Baghdad proved impossible, the Community will have to try an autonomous initiative' (Europe, No. 5397, 21 Dec 1990). Later, on December 30, this approach was again followed by Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German foreign minister, who called for the Twelve

to set up an independent negotiation with Iraq, despite British opposition.

Regardless of the obvious differences in approach, European governments, largely that of France, as well as Germany, Belgium and Spain, became increasingly convinced that the US had badly mishandled the opportunity for a peaceful solution (Dannreuther, 1991-2: 43). Moreover, they argued that the Europeans with their greater Arabist experience, would have a better chance of reaching a solution (The Independent, January 4, 1991). These views provided further encouragement for 'Europeanists' to confirm their wish to act independently of the United States.

When the proposed direct talks between the United States and Iraq stalemated, as a result of disagreement over the date of the meeting, the Europeans felt they would be able to fill this gap and at the initiative of France and Germany, an emergency meeting was called in the early days of the new year (International Herald Tribune, Dec 31, 1990- Jan 1, 1991). The idea of an active and independent European role was supported by the new president of the Council, Luxembourg, and its Foreign Minister, Poos, who believed that 'something must be done to overcome the stalemate' (Ibid, Jan 4, 1991). Poos expressed his readiness to visit Baghdad and it was being said that such a European initiative could yet uncover common ground between Washington and Baghdad which James Baker's efforts over more than five months had failed to achieve. According to Hans-Dietrich Genscher, an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait might be achieved 'with all the skills of diplomacy' at Europe's disposal

(The Times, Jan 4, 1991).

The issue of an independent EC talks with Iraq was one of the most contentious issues within the Community in the early days of 1991. The United States sent a message to the EC urging them not to undertake a peace mission. Britain was also profoundly unenthusiastic about the prospect of such a meeting between the European Community and Iraq, which excluded the United States. But several Community members notably Germany, France and Luxembourg hoped that this would break the diplomatic deadlock. Failure to agree on a common policy could also have led to a direct French initiative. President Mitterrand had already indicated that if there was no dialogue between the US and Iraq by January 3, France would seek to talk directly to Saddam (International Herald Tribune, Dec 20, 1990). The British government was under pressure from its Community colleagues and was criticized 'for giving President Bush a virtual blank cheque'. The British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, responded by stating before the meeting that 'a majority of EC countries will press for direct contact with Baghdad and that this is not a matter where Britain would be wise to try to use its veto' (The Guardian, Jan 4, 1991).

Another source of differences within the EC, and also between Europe and the US, emerged from the desire to link the Kuwait crisis with the Middle East conflict. This move was initiated by France but a majority of the EC governments were content to allow an international conference on Palestinians to go ahead soon after an Iraqi withdrawal (The Times, Jan 4, 1991). This approach was consistent with the

Twelve's suggestion in 1987 for the establishment of an international conference to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict. Indeed, in addition to the historical ties with and economic interests in the Arab world, the presence of a sizeable Arab population in the Mediterranean countries and the pressure exerted by public opinion in Europe, which was strongly opposed to the war (International Herald Tribune, Jan 24, 1991), induced many European governments to make greater efforts to avert war. A kind of linkage between the Iraqi withdrawal and the Palestinian question could increase hope for a peaceful end to the crisis. The attempt by Saddam to link the two issues seemed to exert influence on some European governments, notably the French, to see the linkage as a catalyst for Iraqi withdrawal. The French, indeed, believed that Saddam was looking for a face saving way out of Kuwait and this linkage could offer one such way.

The United States, backed within the Community by Britain and the Netherlands, strongly opposed the link between the Kuwait crisis and the Middle East conflict. Even in the United Nations General Assembly, in December 1990, the US voted against an international peace conference on the Middle East conflict which was voted for by all twelve member states. The resolution was voted 144-2 and apart from the US only Israel voted against (Cromwell, 1992-93: 135-6). Shortly after the resolution, again the Bush administration opposed a further resolution, this time in the Security Council, which supported a Middle East conference, even though it contained elements that had been accepted by the United States before the crisis. Washington seemed to see any move

towards resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict in these circumstances as a reward for Saddam, which was not acceptable for Bush who asserted that there would be 'no negotiation, no compromise, no attempt at face-saving and no reward for the aggressor' (International Herald Tribune, Jan 4, 1991).

In the meeting of the Community foreign ministers on January 4, therefore, discussion centred on two issues: direct talks with Iraq and the linkage issue. France took the view that the EC's Troika should talk to the Iraqi foreign minister and offer linkage. The French submitted a 7 point plan to the meeting including:

- Iraq must abide by the UN resolutions and announce its decision to withdraw from Kuwait before January 15

- Iraq must receive assurance that it will not be attacked once a commitment to withdraw has been made.

- Following Iraq's withdrawal all the other issues pending in the Middle East can be reviewed "within the framework of one or two international conferences".

- The Twelve should invite Tariq Aziz "at the earliest possible date, possibly well before the January 15 deadline" (Europe, No. 5404, Jan 1991: 4).

But this position was vetoed by the British and the Dutch. 'When the Dutch foreign minister Hans Van den Brook argued against acting independently of the US, Roland Dumas remarked: "if the EPC had majority voting on foreign policy, you would be outvoted", leading Hurd to observe that that was

exactly why Britain wanted to maintain unanimity'. As a result, the linkage issue was not officially endorsed by the Community and instead a rather vague wording about other problems of the region was included in the final statement, which was far from what had been sought for by the French. It was at this point that the French decided to prepare for their own initiative which was later presented on January 15 (Freedman, 1990: 67-8).

Despite the reservations of the British and the Dutch, the Twelve Foreign Ministers in their meeting on January 4 decided, nevertheless, to have direct talk with Iraq after the Baker-Aziz meeting, in Geneva.

The Presidency declared that:

'In accordance with the declaration adopted by the European Council in Rome on December 15 1990, Ministers have asked the Presidency to invite the Iraqi Foreign Minister to a meeting with a Troika in Luxembourg on January 10. .... In the spirit of the foregoing, and as soon as the present crisis will have been settled peacefully and with full respect of the resolutions of the United Nation Security Council, the Community and its member states reaffirm their commitment to contribute actively to a settlement of the other problems of the region and establish a situation of security, stability and development there' (Bulletin of the E C, 1/2-1991: 101).

Sharp differences, nevertheless, remained within the Community about the contents of the talk but the refusal of the Iraqi foreign minister to meet the EC delegation, on the ground that the Europeans had no

independent policy of their own and that they were dictated by Washington, saved the EC from further disunity on the issue.

The outcome of the meeting, therefore, was still deadlock. The fact was that differences among the member states and the shadow of the United States on Community decisions made the Twelve unable to initiate a distinct European solution which could have offered a desperate Iraq a way out of Kuwait. The European proposal was, in substance, not much different from that of the US, and so could not invoke encouraging responses from Baghdad.

Nevertheless, the EC continued making efforts, especially when the Baker-Aziz talks failed to reach any compromise. The final attempt of the Twelve was their five-stage peace plan that was transmitted to Iraq through the Secretary General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar. The peace plan consisted of assurances against an allied attack on Iraq, and an international peace conference to deal with all security problems in the Middle East, if Iraq complied with all Security Council Resolutions (Cromwell, 1992-93: 143). This proposal was rejected by Iraq and eventually, on January 14, the Twelve Foreign Ministers held their last meeting before the out-break of the war, and declared that conditions did not exist for any new European Initiative. In their statement they summarized the Twelve's attempts to reach a peaceful solution which is worth quoting:

'Through the Presidency statement of January 4, 1991, the Twelve had clearly indicated that if the resolutions of the Security Council were fully and unconditionally

implemented, Iraq should receive the assurance that it would not be subject to a military intervention.

In the same statement, the Twelve had also clearly reaffirmed their commitment to contribute actively to the settlement of the other problems of the region and of establish their situation of security, stability and development, as soon as the Gulf crisis is resolved.

On the occasion of Rome European council of December 15, 1990, the European community and its Member States had indicated that they remained completely in favour of the convening of an international peace conference on the Middle East at the appropriate moment.

...and in the absence of any signal in this sense, the European Community and its member states regret to have to conclude that the conditions for a new European initiative do not exist as of this moment.'(Bulletin of the E C, 1/2-1991: 103)

### **Convergence and divergence**

After an initial short period of harmony, a number of divergences among the twelve arose in the handling of the crisis. The sharpest differences were between the French and British, who were the main European participants in the coalition. They had different views on almost all the key issues of the crisis, including the role of NATO and WEU, the hostage issue, direct talks with Iraq, and the linkage issue. Even after the out-break of the war, they were still critical of each

other. The British criticized the French government for its individualism and especially for its last minute peace initiative. On the other hand, the French retorted 'that it was Britain that effectively disabled the Community by refusing, with the Dutch, to back a more distinct diplomatic line in favour of a peace conference on the Middle East. Had their attachment to the US not been so strong EC solidarity would have triumphed. Just conceivably, the Persian Gulf war might have been delayed or even averted'(The Independent, 23 Jan 1991)

It could be argued that in reaction to the crisis, the closer identity of interests between France and Germany on one hand and between the United States and Britain on the other, distanced the two groups almost throughout the crisis. On the one hand, France and Germany both had enjoyed excellent relations with Iraq before August 1990. They regarded sanctions against Iraq as expendable and wanted them to be lifted as soon as possible. So, while seeking a peaceful solution to the crisis, they held the view that the issue would be completely resolved once Iraq had withdrawn from Kuwait; it was a question, as Herr Genscher put it of 'nothing less, but nothing more either'. On the other hand, America and Britain did not even see Iraqi withdrawal as sufficient to end the blockade. They wanted to use sanctions as a bargaining instrument to impose restrictions on Iraq (The Times, 4 Jan 1991). These differences of opinion could clearly be seen in the national approaches of these countries.

### **Some Concluding remarks**

Assessing the European Community response to the

Kuwait crisis, it could be said that the special international circumstances in which the crisis happened and the generally encouraging atmosphere that followed the crisis, combined with ambitions for further political integration, pushed them forward to arrange a unified movement vis-a-vis the crisis in the early stages. The fact was that this international environment delayed the appearance of deep differences among the member states and also made it possible for some institutional limitations to be ignored. The result was an unprecedented reactivation of the Community, for a short period.

As the crisis continued and deepened, however, they confronted with growing difficulties. The nature of the crisis was increasingly becoming politico-military, in which the significance of the military aspect was rapidly growing while the policy instrument at the disposal of the Twelve was mainly economic and to a lesser extent political. However, in the often quoted words of the Belgian Foreign Minister, as revealed during the crisis, the Community was an 'economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm' (New York Times, 25 Jan 1991). Therefore, during the early period of response to the crisis, application of the UN decisions on embargo was within the competence and power of the Community, and its response was quick and effective. But as soon as it went beyond this framework, the Community proved both unable to make decisive decisions and unable to employ an effective instrument in dealing with the crisis. The required unanimity in EPC, which in practice required extensive bargaining among the member states, made the political machinery unable to respond adequately

and timely to the crisis which needed immediate reactions. The sharp differences between national interests of the member states, especially between Britain and France, made EPC inconclusive and, therefore, left national choices to take precedence over collective choices. A look at the attitudes of Britain and France during the crisis indicates that they never showed readiness to move from their national policies for the sake of a collective European policy and in some cases even disregarded the decisions which were made by the Community. In the words of Lawrence Freedman, the crisis 'reinforced suspicions that when high national interests are at stake, there would be no respect for the discipline of a common policy' (Freedman, 1991: 199).

The second, and perhaps the most important, shortcoming of the Twelve was the lack of the Community military arm to represent the Twelve in the military arena and support its political moves. The refusal of the Iraqi Foreign minister to accept the invitation to talk with the Twelve on January 10, while agreeing to talk with the US could mainly be attributed to the Iraqi's assumption of the insignificance of the Twelve on the military front and, therefore, in managing the crisis. The Kuwait Crisis, indeed, made it clear that as long as the European Community did not have a unified military force of its own with relevant institutional provisions, as a European military identity, it would lack the necessary political means to influence world affairs. Indeed, without such a capability Europe has no bargaining power vis-a-vis the US. There is truth in the words of the then Secretary General of WEU that Europe could not be compared with the United States



unless it strengthens its defence in order to establish a truly transatlantic bargain. He argued that during the Cold War, the transatlantic bargain was difficult because of the US predominance in the defence field, but with the disappearance of the Soviet threat a more balanced relationship become possible (Eekelen, 1990: 520). With lack of an effective military identity, therefore, it was not surprising that the Europeans had to be subordinated by the Americans.

In sum, it could be argued that the Europeans responded to the Kuwait crisis at three levels: the level of the Security Council of UN, the Community level, and the individual member states' level, while the responses at the Community level were least effective in influencing the course of events and outcome of the crisis.

The failure of the Europeans to play an effective role in the Kuwait crisis, however, was taken by the major actors as approval of their own diverging policies. John Major, saw the lack of EC unity on the Kuwait crisis as an indication that Europe was not ready for political union. He said 'political union and a common foreign and security policy in Europe would have to go beyond statements and extend to action. Clearly, Europe is not ready for that and we should not be too ambitious when it comes to the IGC' (Intergovernmental Conference). Nevertheless, those in favour of political union claimed that the Kuwait crisis provided further evidence for the necessity of establishing a common foreign and security policy. France, Germany, Italy, the Benelux Countries and Jacques Delors, the then President of the Commission, were in this camp. Jacques Delors argued that:

'the Gulf War has provided an object lesson -if one were needed- on the limitation of the EC. It is true that giant steps have been taken along the path of economic integration, and the last two years have seen advances on foreign policy cooperation. But the Community's influence and ability to act have not kept pace. We should interpret this as yet another argument for moving towards a form of political union embracing a common foreign and security policy' (Delors, 1991: 99).

The Italian Prime Minister, Mr Andreotti, drew a similar conclusion from the crisis and insisted that it will have a considerable impact on the Twelve towards achieving the objective of a real common foreign and security policy (*Europe*, No. 5416, 24 Jan 1991). Genscher of Germany concluded that they must strive ever more resolutely to act as one in foreign and security matters (*The Times*, 4 Feb 1991). For Roland Dumas also the principle reason for the Community failure was the fact that the EC had not a common foreign policy yet (Dumas in interview with the author).

The Kuwait Crisis, therefore, brought to the surface the real strengths and weaknesses of the European Community. It revealed that the EC with its realities is not capable of playing more than a secondary role on the international scene. It also demonstrated that it is hard to expect that major practical steps will be taken by the major member states towards the common foreign and security policy in the Community, in the foreseeable future.

The behaviour of the EU member states during the

second Iraq crisis in 2003 may be seen as a proof to this argument. During this crisis the same differences resurfaced among the major European countries. Division between Britain and France<sup>1</sup> again completely divided EU and made it unable to reach a common position, let alone to play a united role, towards the crisis and demonstrated that the EU still suffers the old disabilities in area of foreign and security policy.

## References

### Books

- [1] Barzilai A K and Gil S (eds), *The Gulf Crisis and its Global Aftermath*, Routledge, London, 1993.
- [2] Bulmer S and Scott A(eds), *Economic and Political integration in Europe: Internal Dynamics and Global Context*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1994.
- [3] Burrows Bernard, Geoffrey Denton and Edwards Geoffrey (eds), *Federal Solution to European Issues*, Macmillan, London, 1978.
- [4] Freedman Lawrence and Karsh Efraim, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-91: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order*, Second Edition, faber and faber, London, 1994.
- [5] Gnesotto Nicole and Roper John (eds), *Western*

---

1. In 2003 France strongly opposed any military measure against Iraq and opposed Britain's suggestion of a second UN resolution for legitimizing such military operation and even threatened to veto it. Indeed, in both crises of 1990-91 and 2003 the French approach was largely dictated by its geopolitical perception of Iraq being France's main foothold in the Persian Gulf. See Pirooz Mojtahed-Zadeh, Letter to President Jacques Chirac, Mar.4, 2003..., [www.payvand.com/news/03/mar/1027.html](http://www.payvand.com/news/03/mar/1027.html)

- Europe and the Gulf*, The Institute for Security Studies; Western European Union Paris, 1992.
- [6] Hill Christopher (ed), *National Foreign Policies and European Political Cooperation*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1983.
- [7] Hill Christopher (ed), *The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996.
- [8] Holland Martin, *European Community Integration*, Pinter, London, 1993.
- [9] Knorr Klaus and Verba Sidney (eds), *The international system: theoretical essays*, Princeton U.P., 1961.
- [10] Nuttall Simon, *European Political Cooperation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992.
- [11] Pijpers Alfred (ed), *The European Community at the crossroads*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1992.
- [12] Pijpers Alfred, Regelsberger Elfriede and Wessels Wolfgang in collaboration with Edwards Geoffrey (eds), *European Political Cooperation in the 1980s: A Common Foreign Policy for Western Europe?*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1988.
- [13] Regelsberger Elfriede, Tervarent, Wolfgang Wessels (eds), *Foreign policy of the European Union : from EPC to CFSP and beyond*, Publisher: Boulder, Colo : Lynne Rienner, 1997.
- [14] Rummel Reinhardt (ed), *Toward Political Union: Planning a Common Foreign and Security Policy in the European Community*, Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992.

[15] Smith Hazel, *European Union Foreign Policy and Central America*, Macmillan, London, 1995.

War', *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. 14, 1990, p. 57-71.

**Periodicals**

[16] Cromwell William C, 'Europe, the United States, and the pre-war Gulf crisis', *International Journal*, Vol. XLVIII, winter 1992-93, p. 124-150.

[21] Freedman Lawrence, 'The Gulf and the New World Order', *Survival*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, May/June 1991, p. 195-209.

[17] Dannreuther Roland, 'The Gulf Conflict: A Political and Strategic Analysis', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 264, 1991-92.

[22] Rummel Reinhardt, *Towards political union*, 1992.

[18] Delors Jacques, 'European Integration and Security', *Survival*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, March/April 1991, p. 99-109.

[23] Taylor Paul, 'Intergovernmentalism in the European Community in the 1970s: Patterns and Perspectives', *International Organisation*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Autumn 1982, p. 741-766.

[19] Eekelen Willem van, 'WEU and the Gulf Crisis', *Survival*, Vol. XXXII, No. 6, November/December 1990, p. 519-532.

**EC publications**

*Bulletin of the European Communities Europe*

[20] Freedman Lawrence, 'Europe and the Gulf

[Downloaded from ejih.modares.ac.ir on 2024-04-26]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.25382640.2007.14.1.8.3]