

Europeans Fighting Proliferation: The Test-Case of Iran

Alyson J. K. Bailes*

Abstract: The EU was driven by the Iraq experience to produce its own strategy against WMD proliferation, and induced by the USA's implied threats against Iran to seek a non-violent solution to concerns about the latter's nuclear programme. EU-Iran negotiations have to date not solved the problem, for reasons that include the EU's own internal divisions of authority and its weakness in terms of leverage: but they continue to hold the stage and have at least won time. The EU would do well meanwhile to consider investing more in parts of its WMD strategy that are lower-risk and more under its own control, such as sharing export control expertise and funding safe destruction programmes.

Keywords: EU, CFSP, Iran, non-proliferation, WMD.

1. Introduction

The new US National Security Strategy of 16 March 2006¹ has been widely misquoted as saying that Iran represents the USA's biggest current threat, *tout court*. In fact, it says that »We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran«, but it says this in a section dealing specifically with the challenge of the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which appears only as the third main section in the report (following »Human Dignity« and terrorism). True, the language in the rest of the passage is robust, claiming that »the Iranian regime sponsors terrorism; threatens Israel; seeks to thwart Middle East peace; disrupts democracy in Iraq; and denies the aspirations of its people for freedom«. The USA will take »all necessary measures« to protect its interests if Iran refuses to change, and there is a clear hint that such »confrontation« may be close at hand.

The EU's corresponding strategy document – »A secure Europe in a better world«, adopted by the European Council in December 2003² – does not mention Iran by name, but no particular conclusion should be drawn from that since the USA's previous and extremely militant National Security Strategy (of September 2002)³ did not make the point either. The focus by both sides on Iran as a critical security priority, at least in its 21st century guise, is a construct of the period immediately after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Since Spring 2003, the Europeans and some Americans have been impelled to try to resolve the concern about possible Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons by using methods deliberately different from those used in Iraq. Other Americans may or may not have been looking at Iran as another potential case to be solved militarily, hopefully with a better match of the remedy to the disease than the Iraq episode turned out to be. At the time of writing the first approach has reached a virtual *impasse* and speculation about the second is on the increase.

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the merits of either of these supposed solutions, nor to speculate on what will happen. Instead, it will take the Iran case as an illustration of the EU's new-found engagement in actively tackling the threat of WMD proliferation and as a mirror for the particularities, strengths and weaknesses of the latter. The argument will be developed in four stages: why the EU has addressed itself to the WMD challenge at this time; what are the features of its new WMD Strategy and the main fields for implementing it; why Europeans chose Iran as the main »laboratory« of their approach to a specific proliferation challenge; and what lessons may be learned – especially by Europe – from the results. Enough will be said, in the process, on other aspects of the WMD Strategy's activation to set the Iran story in a broader perspective.

2. The EU as an Actor on WMD

Until very recently, the idea of the EU's taking a prominent role in tackling a security issue linked to WMD – and staking much of its credit on the outcome – would have seemed like a fantasy to Brussels insiders and outsiders alike. It is true that the integrated Europe was never a nuclear innocent. EURATOM was one of the original three European Communities established in the 1950s,⁴ and has for a long time played its part against proliferation by allowing Europeans to cooperate under strict safeguards for the peaceful exploitation of nuclear energy. Since the start of Political Cooperation, the member states have developed common positions of an increasingly clear and formal kind upon arms control and non-proliferation issues arising in other international fora.⁵ And since the end of the Cold War, EU funds have been deployed to help partner countries – above all, the Russian Federation –

⁴ The text of the 1957 Treaty Establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM Treaty) is available at URL <http://europa.eu.int/comm/energy/nuclear/legislation/euratom_en.htm>.

⁵ Some recent examples, which also reflect the EU's support for traditional treaty instruments, are the EU's Common Position adopted before the Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in May 2005; the similar Common Position before the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) Review Conference in 2006; and a text adopted at the same time about EU approaches to the still-not-in-force Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

* Amb. Alyson J.K. Bailes, Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

¹ Text at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf>.

² European Council, Brussels 12 Dec. 2003, text at http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cms_data/docs/2004/4/29/European%20Security%20Strategy.pdf.

³ »The National Security Strategy of the United States of America«, 17 Sep. 2002, text at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ncs/nss.pdf>.

in cleaning up their left-over and unwanted WMD materials and in converting former WMD scientists to new careers.⁶

But whether consciously or unconsciously, up to 2003 the Europeans preferred to leave these as a range of unconnected and relatively low-key activities. The likely reasons, in retrospect, were both external and internal. In the twentieth century the EU generally tried to stay out of what might be called the »hardest« issues of military security in the outside world. It did so particularly when there was a tradition of handling US-European and Russian-European dialogue through other channels – in this case, the Nuclear Planning Group of NATO and NATO's long-standing role as the arena for Western consultations on nuclear arms control. A third point is simply that no-one was making much fuss about proliferation in the 1990s or, consequently, demanding that Europe should do anything special about it. Internally, meanwhile, the topic was sensitive because of the co-existence in the EU of two nuclear powers (the UK and France) with many non-nuclear ones some of whom had strong anti-nuclear views, even as regards civil nuclear power. An interesting attempt between German and French thinkers in the mid-90s to consider the use of French and British weapons as a strategic protection for the whole EU went nowhere,⁷ and the atmosphere was soured by complaints from some fellow EU members, including the newly arrived Nordics, against France's nuclear testing programme at much the same time.

Yet in March 2003 – actually on the very same day that some EU states' forces entered Iraq together with the USA and in the face of outrage from certain other Europeans – the Ambassadorial-level Political and Security Committee that now oversees EU foreign, security and defence policy met in Brussels (in closed seminar format) to start debating a new common strategy of the Union on WMD. The meeting was calm and constructive, with countries like Britain and France, Italy and Sweden all speaking along the same lines. Basic principles and a plan of action were approved as early as the European Council meeting of 20 June⁸ and the full text of a strategy was endorsed by the European Council in December 2003.⁹ Why this sudden breakthrough?

Four explanations come first to mind, starting with the way that the whole issue of proliferation had been boosted up the international agenda since the terrorist attacks on the USA of 11 September 2001. These naturally aroused concern that Al-Qaeda and similarly extreme terrorist movements might resort to using WMD if they could lay their hands on them; but

the USA also focussed increasingly on what it saw as »rogue states« – Iraq, Iran and North Korea – that could pose analogous »asymmetrical« threats to Western populations' safety, whether acting in collusion with terrorists or not. Secondly, the Iraq episode itself – where the USA acted at least ostensibly on WMD-related motives – showed the untenable position that Europe itself could be placed in when and if such threats were tackled in the way that the hardliners of George W. Bush's Administration preferred: with ostracism, coercion and the final use of non-internationally-mandated military force against the supposed offenders. EU countries were split among each other on some key issues of the crisis, and from the USA on others, and (providing the third motivating factor) had to cast around urgently for some form of »work therapy« to prove that they could still produce constructive and consensus-based policies on issues of major security importance. This same impulse was to bring a plethora of other advances in EU security and defence policies during the same year, including the first draft in June of an overall EU Security Strategy,¹⁰ the EU's first-ever autonomous military operation outside Europe (Operation ARTEMIS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, July 2003), and during the autumn the agreement on a new civil-military planning cell and European Defence Agency (EDA). Fourth and not least, these ad hoc pressures were underpinned by a general move towards the recognition of the EU's many-faceted potential (and needs, and responsibilities) in the strategic realm, as a result both of its own evolutionary dynamics, and its prospective growth in capacities, in geo-strategic extent and exposure with the decision to carry out a »Big Bang« enlargement to ten further Central European and Mediterranean states in 2005.

It was against this background that the overall EU Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003 identified terrorism using WMD as perhaps the single greatest threat to the EU and its citizens.¹¹ The specific WMD Strategy set out the conclusion in further detail: WMD proliferation had become a clear and omnipresent threat to the international peace and stability on which the EU's own survival and welfare depended, and (to quote:) »all the states of the Union and the EU institutions have a collective responsibility for preventing these risks by actively contributing to the fight against proliferation«.

3. What EU strategy?

The WMD strategy of 2003 is a typical EU product: a complex and sophisticated text that strives to bring together a uniquely wide range of institutional resources and possibilities.¹² It is

6 See Anthony, I., »Reducing Threats at the Source: a European perspective on cooperative threat reduction« (SIPRI Research Report no 19, Oxford University Press, 2004); and the report of a Pilot Project (financed by the European Commission) on the EU's future contributions to International Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Assistance, text at <http://www.sipri.org/contents/expcon/euppconfmaterials.html>.

7 This particular issue was reopened by President Chirac in a speech of 19 January 2006, when he offered among other things to dedicate French nuclear capacities for the defence of Europe. Once again, however, his statements drew largely critical reactions from the European audience.

8 Basic Principles at <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/03/st10/st10352en03.pdf>, Action Plan at <http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/03/st10/st10354en03.pdf>.

9 »EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction«, European Council 12 Dec. 2003, text at http://ue.eu.int/cms3_applications/Applications/newsRoom/LoadDocument.asp?directory=en/misc/&filename=78340.pdf.

10 The first draft of »A secure Europe in a better world« was presented by the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana, and gained immediate general endorsement at the Thessaloniki European Council of 20 June (http://eu.ue.int/ueDocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/reports/76255.pdf). For the final version see note 2 above.

11 For more on this and other features of the ESS see Bailes, A.J.K., »The European Security Strategy: an evolutionary history«, SIPRI Policy Paper no 10 of Feb. 2005, text at <http://www.sipri.org>.

12 For more on the WMD strategy see Ahlström, C., »The EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction« in Kile, S.N. (ed.), »Europe and Iran: perspectives on non-proliferation« (Oxford University Press, 2005). Much of the analysis in the central sections of the present paper is indebted to this volume.

typical of its time, i.e. the first period of »rebound« after the Iraq crisis, in that it strives to combine the kind of seriousness about the threat that seemed necessary to boost the EU's image in American and other people's eyes with the building of a specifically European paradigm for policy responses, based on a strong preference for orderly, multilateral, cooperative solutions and for restricting the use of force to a last resort. (The general EU Security Strategy exhibits just the same features). Key features of the WMD strategy in this context – not necessarily in the order in which they appear in the text – are

- (a) The explicit support it gives for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation treaties, for the international agencies that serve them, and for the powers and resources these agencies need to carry out effective monitoring and enforcement. There is a (clearly intended) contrast here to the approach of the USA which, since the start of George W. Bush's Presidency, had expressed open scepticism about the value of such »traditional« methods of control and had been especially allergic to any notion that they might constrain the USA's own actions;
- (b) A determination that the EU should itself set the best possible example in all relevant fields; hence the strategy provides for a review and strengthening of the Union's own performance in treaty observance, inspection, export controls, relevant safety practices and so on;
- (c) A recognition, nevertheless, that treaties and good examples are not enough to ensure universal good behaviour: the strategy thus acknowledges the need for active and practical measures, notably to cut off access to dangerous materials and knowledge for terrorists and other non-state actors who are difficult to »catch« by either international law or military force. In this context it affirms, *inter alia*, the value of EU support for International Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Assistance (INDA) programmes designed to reduce risk and temptation by destroying existing WMD stocks and converting human competences;
- (d) A directive that the goals of the WMD strategy should be »mainstreamed« into all other relevant *internal* policies and instruments of the Union (e.g.: nuclear safety);
- (e) The application of the same principle to *external* policy areas, entailing (*inter alia*) cooperation with major partners such as the USA (where using compatible methods), active assistance and competence transfer for »new neighbour« zones and for other major strategic players (China, India), and the establishment of suitable links and conditionabilities between WMD-related goals and the Union's development assistance policy and regional relationships. This last thought gave rise to the decision to draft a standard »non-proliferation« clause – actually adopted in November 2003¹³ – for insertion on a case-by-case basis in all the EU's future (cooperation, trade etc.) agreements with third countries;
- (f) An approach to individual »problem« cases based on broad security analysis, seeing WMD offences as the symptom rather than root cause of bad security and bad behaviour.

As the strategy says: »The best solution to the problem of proliferation of WMD is that countries should no longer feel they need them. If possible, political solutions should be found to the problems which lead them to seek WMD«. The EU advocates a firm but holistic treatment of such cases, employing political and economic levers, dialogue and negotiation and other efforts to improve the regional environment, while keeping forceful interdiction and intervention as last resorts.

4. Why Iran?

Before turning in more detail to the Iran case, it is important to underline that the follow-up to the EU's 2003 WMD decisions went forward across a broad front and involved many new ventures in institutional, functional, export control, INDA and other dimensions. The first country with whom the EU tried out its new demand for a »non-proliferation clause« was actually Syria, in the context of the already ongoing negotiations for an EU-Syrian »Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement« (EMAA). Although Syria was ready to bargain, the experiment quickly ran into difficulties because EU states had different views on whether the Syrians should be pressed to accept the maximum set of elements (including ones defined as »non-essential« as well as »essential«) from the original nearly one-page-long »clause«. After the EU got its act together internally, the deal was struck with Damascus relatively fast and an EMAA was initialled on 19 October 2004. Since then, similar clauses have been accepted by or are being negotiated with several other countries, but the problems inherent in the formula have been further exposed in the process: including the fact that the clause is not legally required for agreements that concern only »Community« affairs on the EU side (such as a trade agreement with Pakistan).¹⁴ All in all, the EU's bold attempt to apply WMD leverage with its single biggest tool – its ability to offer all kinds of economic benefits to partners – has produced a sobering reminder of how hard it is to hold the EU's different states and its constitutional organs closely enough together to really »grip« on a given interlocutor. (More will be said on this below.)

However, Europe's direct diplomatic intervention with Iran has been beyond any doubt the most dramatic, and the most publicly and politically visible, test of the new WMD strategy. Its symbolic character is not weakened but heightened by the fact that it was in preparation before the formal approval of the strategy document in December 2003, by three of the EU's largest states – Britain, France and Germany – who had also been key to the success of the strategy negotiations from March onwards. On 21 October 2003 in Tehran, the Foreign Ministers of these three nations declared that they had agreed with Iran that it would adopt the IAEA's Additional Protocol (imposing a higher degree of safeguards and transparency at Iranian nuclear plants) and would suspend the enrichment of uranium. The EU institutions became involved soon afterwards with Solana visiting Tehran, and with Brussels making

¹³ The text is contained in a Note from the General Secretariat of 19 Nov. 2003 and is available at http://www.sipri.org/contents/expcon/wmd_mainstreaming.pdf.

¹⁴ Quille, G. and Keane, R., »The EU and Iran: towards a new political dialogue« in Kile, S.N. (ed.), »Europe and Iran«, as in note 12 above.

clear that finalizing an EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) with Iran would now be conditional also on resolving the proliferation issue – although EU concerns about human rights in Iran also remained very much part of the package.

The rest of the story has become public property and has been a story of unending problems and setbacks – mixed with transient hopes – for the Europeans, and indeed for everyone attempting to negotiate peacefully with Tehran (including the IAEA's Secretary-General Mohamed El Baradei, and latterly the Russians). Iran, from the outset, emphasized that its moratorium on uranium enrichment and related activities was a temporary measure, and by end-2005 had declared that it would no longer observe it. It rejected all Western (or Russian) inducements, including cooperation in alternative methods of energy provision, as insufficient: usually because they would not allow Iran to exercise what it sees as its right as a non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT to develop a complete nuclear fuel cycle including uranium enrichment, but also (in many analysts' view) because the USA has never been directly engaged and has never offered Tehran a clear guarantee against attack. Meanwhile, Iran has still failed to satisfy the IAEA that it has come clean about its past nuclear activities, and it is these technical charges that provided the basis for the IAEA Board of Governors to vote at an emergency meeting on 4 February 2006 to take steps to report the Iran case to the UN Security Council (where it immediately became embroiled in fresh behind-the-scenes disputes about next steps).¹⁵ In sum, even if – without knowing the end of the story – it would be premature to describe the EU involvement as a »failure«, there is no simple way in which it can be viewed as a success.

Knowing full well what a difficult subject Iran could be, why did the Europeans pick on Iran for their main sally into proliferation diplomacy? For a start, of all the »problem cases« currently in focus, Iran is – after the US/UK buy-out of Libya¹⁶ – the closest to the EU homeland. It lies in an extended neighbourhood region that is important to Europe in general strategic terms, and also as a source and transit zone for energy supplies. Iran is generally considered to be the region's oldest nation-state and, under most historical circumstances, one of its most cohesive and powerful players. As elsewhere, the EU's characteristic strategic approach inclines it towards seeing such a country as the key to the whole region's stability (including its prospects of some day enjoying EU-style multilateral integration), creating *prima facie* reason for Europeans to try to turn it – whatever the obstacles – into a pillar of the status quo. As for the immediate context of 2003, the Europeans were driven above all by a US statement in September that if Iran had not come clean over its nuclear programme by the next month, Washington would report it to the UN Security Council. Seeing no useful direction that such action could

lead in other than further escalation, EU states had a powerful incentive to start some alternative process moving that might at the very least buy time for all concerned. A further motive for this was the European realization that Iranian cooperation or at least acquiescence (and a limit on Iranian mischief-making) could be crucial for allowing the Iraqi mess to be cleared up, and for avoiding a dangerous tip in the regional power balance – or an even sharper polarization – after the fall of Saddam Hussein¹⁷. Last but not least, the EU had and still has a strong self-interest in avoiding – as well as a normative preference against – any US *military* attack on Iran (or an Israeli attack somehow condoned by Washington), such as might be provoked if all other avenues seemed closed.

Turning to more inward-looking factors, the EU's members had been testing the value of active engagement with Iran for more than a decade already, pursuing a »critical dialogue« on trade and human rights issues that was raised to the level of a »comprehensive dialogue« in 1998. The eventual solution found against that background for the Iranian »fatwa« against British author Salman Rushdie gave some cause to hope that patient European diplomacy might bear fruit over proliferation as well. Finally, Europe's first attempt at creative mediation over WMD had to be one where its few largest powers were not only behind the idea but relatively likely to stick together, and the Iran case satisfied this: in fact, despite occasional reports of divergence, the »Big Three« did keep their alignment right up to and including the March 2006 IAEA decisions. Other possible »targets« would have been either too distant to generate the necessary common will, or so close to home that they risked being more divisive (like certain Russia-related, or even Iraq-related, issues).

5. Lessons learned

What conclusions may be drawn at this stage in time, first about Europe's performance vis-à-vis Iran, and secondly about the effectiveness and credibility of the WMD strategy in general? While it is clearly too early for a final verdict on either point, the analysis may first be approached by noting four challenges – or actually, paradoxes – that affect the type of approach that the Europeans chose to adopt (not that they had much choice!) on the Iranian case itself.

National or Collective Muscle? The fact that the big »EU3« carried out their first phase of negotiation with Tehran confidentially and without consulting anyone else caused understandable annoyance both among other EU members, and for Solana: but it is hard to see where else in the structure the will to act would have come from, how the decision could have been taken fast enough, and who else the Iranians would have listened to in the given circumstances. Other key discussions on the evolving non-proliferation agenda between European and other major players (the USA, Japan, Russia, China etc) normally take place not via Brussels but in the G8, the UN

¹⁵ Specifically, the Board of Governors called on the IAEA Director General to make a report to the Board on the implementation of this and previous Board resolutions and then convey the report to the Security Council after the Board's next (March 2006) meeting. See IAEA, »Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran«, Resolution adopted by the IAEA Board of Governors, GOV/2006/14, Vienna, 4 Feb. 2006, URL http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2006/gov_2006-14.pdf.

¹⁶ See Hart, J., and Kile, S.N., »Libya's renunciation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles« in SIPRI Yearbook 2005: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, OUP Aug. 2005.

¹⁷ Iran is also a part of the jigsaw for the very difficult Kurdish question: its handling of its own Kurds and its stand on the integrity or break-up of Iraq are both very pertinent to whether this problem leads to a new chain-reaction of violent conflict in the region, or not.

Security Council or in other small-group and bilateral settings, led by the same three Europeans plus Italy, Poland etc according to context. Smaller EU powers that have taken initiatives have often chosen to do so in fora outside the EU – including both the UN machinery, and the North Atlantic Council – not least because they can profile their national policies more freely there. It is telling that, while former Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh was the first to propose the drafting of the EU's collective WMD strategy, the Swedish Government shortly after launched a purely national (and more idealistic) initiative in the form of the independent international WMD Commission headed by Dr Hans Blix¹⁸. On the other hand, the Iran story also provides a warning against excessive cynicism on this issue because it shows how much the big powers depend – once the horse-trading becomes serious – on political back-up and solidarity by all EU members (including an EU common front in other international institutions); on access to institutional resources including Solana himself; and on the EU's role as a collective legal entity which alone can make binding cooperation agreements or, conversely, impose European sanctions. An obvious conclusion would be that more effort is needed to reconcile the various European roles, rights and sensitivities involved; with, perhaps, special attention to optimizing the role of the less big EU members and of the collective organs, which are the ones most likely to be sidelined in traditional power-play.

Sticks and Carrots. The EU has a potentially much wider range of both of these than any individual nation or even any other institution could command, including its treaty-making powers already referred to and its ownership of large central funds. But, as already hinted in relation to Syria – and this is of course a general problem for EU strategy – the tools that have been »collectivized« remain spread out over the three different »pillars« of the Union's structure (foreign and defence affairs, justice and home affairs and the »core« treaty areas including trade and finance), all of which have different governance rules and procedures; while other important powers and capacities are still split between Brussels and national capitals. Even finding an efficient way to discuss and decide what particular mixture of means should be applied to a given case is tricky, let alone applying them all in timely fashion and in a tight enough »pincer« mode¹⁹. The second stage of the problem is that, as the Iran case has underlined, the impact of European sticks and carrots may prove too weak overall to bring the required changes in the other party's behaviour, not least because that party may refuse to recognize some of the sticks as sticks or any of the carrots as carrots.²⁰ The third element that often complicates the affair, and certainly has in Iran, is that the interlocutor itself may not be »coordinated« in the sense of having a clear decision-making process and

18 On the Blix Commission see <http://www.wmdcommission.org>. For comments on the use of the EU framework for arms control ends by one set of states – the Nordics – see the chapters on small arms by N. Marsh, and on WMD by L. van Dassen and A. Wetter respectively, in Bailes, A., Herolf, G., and Sundelius, B. (eds.), »The Nordic Countries and the European Defence Policy«, OUP April 2006.

19 For more on this see Kile, S.N., »Final thoughts on Iran, the EU and the limits of conditionality« in Kile, S.N. (ed.), »Europe and Iran«, as note 12 above.

20 For instance, the Iranians were cool on the EU's (US-backed) offer of progress towards WTO membership because this would have forced Iran's economy to conform to what they saw as partly non-legitimate criteria.

unitary will, or playing its hand in a transparent and predictable way.²¹ Though some aspects of the »cultural« challenge presented by Iran may be unique, such problems are likely to confront the EU also when pursuing its WMD strategy with any other player that is (a) not small and weak, (b) not within the enlargement catchment area and (c) not in any close historical or cultural (e.g., ex-colonial) relationship with Europe itself. This leads back to the very large question of whether the EU's »nice policeman« approach (on WMD or any other strategic challenge) can work when the targets themselves are not given to niceness, and when the EU and its members lack the strength, or the will, or both to try to enforce change by any other method. It is fair to add that the methods of military coercion experimented with by the George W. Bush Administration did not work in Iraq either, and that a possible military strike on Iran is widely considered to be far more risky than any likely benefit would justify. Moreover, real-world experience is more on the EU's side than might be thought, in that the successful examples of countries retreating from WMD proliferation since the 1980's have more often than not involved essentially voluntary steps without (direct) military compulsion – *vide* South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Libya.

Independence and Interplay. The point of having an EU strategy is to let the Europeans act on their own initiative and in their own style, but in any serious case of WMD concern it is not realistic to expect they would ever have the arena to themselves. The whole context for the Iran endeavour was set by the USA's attitude to Tehran, and the USA's posture of exerting pressure – by direct warnings and actions in the IAEA and UN – without ever talking directly with Iran was an »interference factor« in the EU's efforts from the start. Later the Russian authorities became involved, talking bilaterally with the Iranians on possible nuclear industrial deals in a way that was meant to explore peaceful solutions but inevitably tangled the diplomatic lines, and China's attitude also became crucial in the last stage before IAEA referral to the UN. All these factors limited the EU's »ownership« of the diplomatic process, both directly and in the secondary sense that any institutional role to be played by the IAEA was clearly not going to be steered by the EU alone. On the contrary, because it was the USA that was always raising the stakes in this and in other institutional contexts, the Europeans were almost invariably forced to play a tactical game of the USA's choosing. Their record in this light does not actually look too bad, because by 2005 they had managed to bring round Washington from earlier mistrust of their efforts to a willingness to back up some of their offers to Iran (eg regarding entry to the World Trade Organization, WTO); and it can certainly be argued that the chances to build a common front with Russia and China were much better with the EU's engagement than they would have been if these other powers had had to relate purely to an unregenerate US stance. A verdict on the process aspects of this case, therefore (leaving aside the outcome), might be that the EU should not be discouraged from applying its distinctive approach where this offers some *prima facie* comparative advantages, but that

21 See the chapters by Iranian authors J. Roshandel and H.A. Balouji in Kile, S.N. (ed.), »Europe and Iran«, as note 12 above.

it will always need to exercise its diplomatic skill and resolve at two levels: with the target state or region, and with other actors aiming at the same target. If it aims at synergy or complementarity with such players, it must further consider what price it will have to pay and is ready to pay for that result.

Strategy as Therapy: Kill or Cure? As argued above, the EU's WMD strategy and its test-case in Iran reflected among other things a conscious attempt to (re-)build unity and confidence between the EU3 and all member states. Could a bad or barren outcome do the corresponding damage to European cohesion? Hopefully, the EU can avoid the tendency often shown by Washington in parallel cases to over-dramatize and to swing from one mood extreme to the other. The Europe-Iran initiative has if nothing else bought time (a period of time that was especially important for Iraq), raised the EU's profile and taught it some useful lessons both good and bad. The Big Three have held together better than many expected, and this has doubtless helped the EU to maximize common ground in preparing for the not always simple challenges (on which more below) of the NTP and BTWC Review Conferences and the UN Summit of 2005. Perhaps more importantly, the huge crisis of confidence unleashed upon the Union by the negative French and Dutch referendums of Spring 2005 on the proposed new EU Constitution has not only dwarfed the impact of any specific setback in external affairs, but made the CFSP and ESDP in general look like one of the best-performing branches of the European enterprise at present. While short-term recriminations cannot be ruled out, therefore, it seems likely that most Europeans would end up seeing a disastrous outcome of the Iran case as much more Iran's fault, and most likely the USA's fault, than their own.

What of the verdict on *the WMD strategy in general*? Answering that question properly would require a much larger study than this one. The WMD strategy has literally dozens of sub-objectives, and when these are multiplied by the number of direct and indirect European tools that could be applied to each one and the factors causing those tools to work well or badly, the result is a huge Rubik's Cube of potential analysis. A simpler way to organize the evidence might be to posit that the EU has a set of choices for WMD-related action ranging from high-cost to low-cost (meaning the costs in EU and national resources, of every sort) and high-risk to low-risk (meaning the risks involved both in other people's reactions, and potential divisiveness within the Union's membership). One example of low-cost, low-risk action would be the preparation of EU Common Positions and/or Joint Statements for key WMD-related events in other fora, like the NPT Review of 2005, the BTWC Review of 2006 and the negotiations on the UN Summit Outcome document of September 2005. What these cases have shown, however, is that (a) a joint position that is permissively enough drafted to bridge all intra-EU differences may be too loose to stop individual countries playing contrasting roles in the actual talks, and too mild to spur any major breakthroughs; and (b) that the EU remains at an inherent tactical disadvantage vis-à-vis key national actors (not just the USA) who have more extreme positions and are ready to manoeuvre more boldly. The EU's being in the right thus does not necessarily boost the odds in favour of the right result:

the multilateral equivalent of the »nice policeman's« dilemma mentioned above. On the other hand, low-cost low-risk *practical action* like the sharing and strengthening of WMD-relevant export control competence in other states and regions does good with no obvious down-side, and may serve broader EU aims of security partnership with, and improved governance by, the recipients. The EU approved in 2004 a Pilot Project that has led to such export control assistance efforts during 2006 with Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and a further (2005) Pilot Project will finance similar assistance to China, the United Arab Emirates and Ukraine (plus continued work with Serbia-Montenegro).²²

High-risk, high-cost options such as military action against an offending state – or the non-military equivalent which might be a complete break of relations, repudiation of agreements and imposition of sanctions – are theoretically possible under the EU strategy, but are clearly not practical politics at present. Should such action be demanded/initiated by someone else (probably the USA), therefore, we might expect either that EU states would split two ways over their national involvement as in the case of Iraq, or would collectively try to find some »softer« alternative. The WMD strategy would definitely suffer a setback in the first case. The second contingency closely corresponds to what happened on Iran; and while that case seems to have done little actual harm to anyone (including the EU itself), it cannot be said (yet) to have come anywhere near dictating the outcome. This leaves the option of low-risk, high-cost action as an interesting one to explore: typified by the EU's opportunity to contribute (as it has in the past) to the expenses of documenting, collecting, guarding and safely destroying left-over WMD objects in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere.²³ The verdict of a recent independent study led by SIPRI was that the EU could usefully and productively spend some € 950 million on these goals in the next medium-term budget period from 2007-2013.²⁴ This sum is less than two per cent of the EU's total spending on external action (or roughly equivalent to annual EU development aid for the Congo). Yet, while the new medium-term budget is not yet public or final, there is concern that only a fraction of the recommended amount will be programmed in the EU's »Stability Instrument« for that period and most of this will be tied to other, not directly proliferation-related goals. Such parsimony seems to run against all the logic of European comparative advantages in the WMD field as analysed above. It is also likely to be unfavourably regarded both by the USA and by Russia, which has a chance to press the matter at the highest level as it chairs the G8 (where INDA programmes have been coordinated under the name of the Global Partnership) this year. It remains to be seen whether EU actions in this field, as so many others, will continue to be demand-led and whether a further mixture of bad experiences and benign openings may yet propel the WMD strategy to greater heights, just as it stimulated the birth of the strategy three years ago.

22 See Background Paper no. 7 at <http://www.sipri.org/contents/expcon/eupconmaterials.html>.

23 Other activities which have considerable, though less daunting, costs are scientist re-training and the improvement of safety and security at civil nuclear, chemical and bio-science installations.

24 See the Pilot Project report at <http://www.sipri.org/contents/expcon/eupconmaterials.html>, and its Background Paper no. 2.