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# Great Expectations: The EU's Social Role as a Great Power Manager

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**Abstract:** Through the case of EU foreign and security policy we reconsider the concept of *great power*. According to common wisdom, the EU cannot be a great power, whatever the pronouncements of its top officials may be. We argue that ‘great power’ has been miscast in IR theory as a *status* rather than as a *social role*, and, consequently, that the EU can indeed be viewed as playing the great power role. Such a conceptual shift moves analytical attention away from questions of what the EU *is* – ‘big’, ‘small’, ‘great’, and so on – to what it is expected to *do* in international politics. We focus on the expectation that great powers engage in the management of the international system, assessing the EU as a great power manager in two senses: first, in the classical sense of ‘great power management’ of Hedley Bull – which centers on great powers’ creation of regional spheres of influence and the maintenance of the general balance of power – and second, in light of recent corrections to Bull’s approach by Alexander Astrov and others, who suggest great power management has changed toward a logic of governmentality, i.e. ‘conducting the conduct’ of lesser states.

**Keywords:** great power, great power management, IR theory, social roles, EU foreign policy, international order

## INTRODUCTION: THE EU AS A GREAT POWER

On 28 June 2016, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini announced the publication of an ambitious new Global Strategy – the EUGS (European Union, 2016). The EUGS proclaims that “with half a billion people, a large economy, and a ‘wide and deep’ diplomatic network,” the world “need[s] a strong Union like never before.” The EUGS 2016 might be considered a surprising document, appearing with fanfare and ambition as it did just five days after one of the EU’s largest members – the United Kingdom – voted to leave the Union. But an alternative interpretation sees the EUGS as signifying the staying-power of the EU as a now-prominent actor on the world stage. The EU began the

1950s as largely an economic community. Today, however, while having sole competence in trade policy for its 27 members (after the UK withdrawal) – with a combined GDP of over \$14.5 trillion – the EU also boasts large and growing capabilities for influencing world politics beyond economics, and a willingness to use them (Kaunert and Zwolski, 2013; Smith, 2014; Wolff and Whitman, 2012).

In this paper, we use the emergence of the EU as a consequential actor in global security as a prompt to reconsider a key notion in International Relations (IR) – *great power* – and explore the implications of this reconsideration for international politics and order. We argue that ‘great power’ has been miscast in IR theory as a *status* rather than as a *social role*. The EU can indeed be viewed as a great power, we maintain, once great power is understood as a role rather than a status. We show that when conceptualized as a role, great power has significant potential for improving our understanding of and explaining not only EU foreign policy, but also that of other great powers or would-be great powers. Such a conceptual shift usefully moves analytical attention away from questions of what the EU or any other actor in world politics is – ‘big,’ ‘small,’ ‘great’ or not, and so on – to questions of what they are expected to *do*. Bracketing the ontological question of what the EU *really is* and grasping the role-based expectations that *constitute* it as an actor, we suggest, takes us further in explaining its curious agency in world politics.

To make good on this claim we assess the EU as a great power manager in two senses: first, in the classical sense of “great power management” (Bull, 2012 [1977]: 194–222), which centers on great powers’ creation of regional spheres of influence and the maintenance of the general balance of power; and second, in light of recent corrections to Bull’s approach by Alexander Astrov (2011a) and others,<sup>1</sup> who suggest great power management (hereafter GPM) has changed toward a logic of governmentality—“conducting the conduct” of lesser states.

We show that leaving assessments of the *quality* or *effectiveness* of EU foreign and security policy aside, the principal expectations acting on and being acted upon by EU leaders can be best grasped in terms of great power management and the great power role in these two senses. The primary purpose of such a reconceptualization of great power and its application to the EU is to recapture the concept’s usefulness for thinking about the contemporary international order. The term great power is often used loosely, referring at times to states as different as the US and so-called regional powers like Iran or Saudi Arabia, but not usually to established non-state actors like NATO and the EU (although see Buzan and Waever, 2003; Astrov, 2011a: 13). But for reasons of both analytical usefulness and faithfulness to real world differences, it is important to restrict the concept’s application to a more limited class of international actors.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of the EU, our reconceptualization of great power as a role allows us to answer the following core questions: *why do* non-EU states expect and urge the

EU, a union which was originally conceived as economic in means and regionally-focused, to do things that go well beyond economic matters, like crisis prevention and even, in a Foucauldian sense, 'conducting the conduct' of lesser states internationally? *What is the EU's motivation to expend significant political and economic capital on managing political matters not only in its neighborhood but also in other distant places?* We could answer the first question by saying that it is because the EU is increasingly expected to behave as a great power manager, despite its compound nature and the lack of attributes of a classical GP state – the success of its policies notwithstanding.<sup>3</sup>

We proceed with our analysis as follows. We first reprise the standard conceptualization of great power as status, showing how it closes down at least as many analytical avenues as it opens up. We then recast great power as a social role, and describe classic and more recent views of great power management. The bulk of the paper then assesses the extent to which the European Union can be understood as responding to the expectations of the great power role and engaging in GPM. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our argument for future studies of EU foreign policy and 'great powers' other than the EU.

### **GREAT POWER: STATUS OR SOCIAL ROLE?**

According to common wisdom, the EU cannot be a great power, whatever the pronouncements of its top officials. The EU is not a state or even a unified actor, and it possesses no army of its own. The EU can best be understood as a peculiar, even *sui generis*, form of international organization, as can the United Nations (UN) or the African Union (AU). For some thinkers who do not subscribe to the common wisdom, if the EU plays a role on the international stage it is as a 'small' (Toje, 2011) or 'middle' power, not a great one.

However, the EUGS 2016 seems to signal *precisely* the Union's commitment to playing a great power role in international politics. As Mogherini argues, important actors within Europe – France, Germany, and, until recently, the UK – and beyond it, expect the EU to engage in behaviours characteristic of great powers ("wherever I travel, our partners expect the European Union to play a major role," she notes). Such behaviours include high-level diplomacy, like participation in the Iran nuclear negotiations, and maintaining international security, as in the case of anti-piracy military operations off Somalia.

As typically theorized in realist-inspired approaches, the term great power refers to a status attained by the largest states measured in material terms (e.g. Kennedy, 1989: 3–38). Great-power-as-status is most clearly on display in Kenneth Waltz's definition, which, although 40 years old, remains influential (e.g. Monteiro, 2011/12: 13). For Waltz (1979: 129–131, 162), only if a state is in the first rank across a range of sectors – military, economics, population size, and political competence – does

it count as a great power. Should a state be lacking in one or more of these categories, it is disqualified from the category.

Critics have taken issue with this material understanding of great power. For constructivists, great power is not only a material category but a social one also (see, e.g., Bukovansky et al., 2012: 25–50). Constructivists point to two aspects of great power attribution missed by a material status-based approach: the necessity of recognition of the great power as such by its peers, and the associated notion of a great power ‘club’ complete with membership rules and responsibilities (for an insightful recent discussion of this, see Loke, 2016). Japan’s defeat of Russia in the war of 1905 therefore afforded Japan entry to the great power club, whereas previously it had been considered a peripheral power. Nonetheless, constructivists often share with their materialist colleagues an understanding of great power as status, a property of some states and not others; they simply add recognition to the list of assets great powers enjoy.

From the perspective of great-power-as-status the EU is not a great power. Neither, importantly, are contemporary China, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Russia, and Japan, nor the UK, France, and Germany. Some of these are ‘aspiring great powers,’ while the big European states are ‘former great powers,’ which further proves the inadequacy of the ‘club’ conception of great power-ness described above, at least for the current era. The problem with a status-based understanding of great power is that it leaves the label applicable to one state and one state only today: the United States of America. This renders it difficult to analyse the significance of the rise of states like China until they reach the US level of material power across all of Waltz’s categories. In the case of China in particular, although it might not measure up to America in all areas, it can surely no longer be understood as simply a ‘normal power’.

The concept of great power understood as a status would also, we would suggest, be in fact *inapplicable* to the US, which is anything but a traditional great power. Indeed, Hedley Bull himself (2002 [1977]: 196) was sceptical about the applicability of the term great power to international order in the period in which he was writing. The then-prominent label ‘super-power’ was, in his opinion, of “doubtful utility.”<sup>4</sup> The concept of great power does not seem adequate to the US case, but the notion of super-power adds little analytically.

Conceptualizing great power as status then seems to close down as many significant lines of inquiry as it opens up. Rather than jettisoning the concept altogether, however, we propose explicitly recasting great power as a social role and considering the theoretical and empirical implications of such a reformulation. While roles and statuses are related, importantly, they are not the same.

Statuses, as applied to international politics, are “collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organization, and diplomatic clout)” (Paul, Larson,

and Wohlforth, 2014: 7). Status-oriented behaviour is focused on acting in ways appropriate to one's rank order in a hierarchy, and gaining recognition as having such a status, for example, by dressing more professionally than one's employees. Status is undoubtedly important in world politics, representing a prominent aspect of decision-making of both large – think of Russia's long-standing desire to be acknowledged as a great power (Neumann, 2008) – and small states (see de Carvalho and Neumann, 2014). But there is good reason to consider great power as a role, not a status.

The key difference between roles and statuses is that statuses have fewer and more bounded behavioural expectations attached to them than roles. Roles are, *by definition*, sets of thick expectations about behaviour attached to particular positions in a social setting (Joas, 1993: 214–237), expectations that, crucially, are not limited to concerns over status ranking. To continue the work wear example, considering someone's social role tells us why some people – say entrepreneurs (or professors when not teaching!) – might eschew traditional business-wear, choosing to wear fashionable or comfortable clothing to work instead, regardless of what such clothing communicates in terms of status. The status of professors or entrepreneurs is not diminished by wearing comfortable clothing to work in the way the status of others in business or administration of similar rank might be, and understanding why rests on the expectations that make up the professor and entrepreneur roles.

Thinking of great power in a role-based manner, as opposed to in status terms, thus opens up questions related to the broader social context which underpins appropriate behaviour. Again, why might someone signal high status by wearing a reserved business suit, while others might choose high fashion? The answer hinges on their role within a particular social milieu. In world politics, the social milieu is *international society* or, in other terms, *international order* understood in a far more culturally thick way than realists in IR theory have tended to give credence to.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, role theory has proven productive in IR and foreign policy analysis, experiencing something of a revival in recent years. A full exploration of role theory exceeds the scope of this paper (see, among others, Malici and Walker, 2017; Thies, 2010; Thies and Breuning, 2012), but the following concepts have proven particularly insightful and are taken forward below as a way of thinking about how roles structure social expectations and signal them to role-playing individuals, here state leaders: 1) *role-taking*, the process by which leaders adopt the perspective of important interlocutors to assess the range of behaviors they are expected to engage in; 2) *role-making*, the active process of attempting to create, through behavioral and linguistic cues, a particular social role; and finally 3) *alter-casting*, the attempt to induce certain behaviors from others that accord with one's understandings of the respective roles being played in a social interaction.<sup>6</sup>

In viewing great power as a role rather than a status, the key question becomes: what are great powers expected to *do* within the current international order; what does the role of a great power entail?

### **BEYOND BALANCING: GREAT POWER MANAGEMENT**

When IR scholars have been posed the question of what great powers do in world politics, they have overwhelmingly focused on the balance of power. However, recent research has brought the primacy of power balancing into question. Scholars have shown, for example, how states often balance threats (Walt, 1986) or risk (Taliaferro, 2004), or fail to balance at all (Kaufman et al., 2008). More importantly, it also seems clear that great powers do far more than balance power. They also act to uphold and shape the other ‘fundamental institutions’ of international order: international law; diplomacy; war; and great power management (see especially Bull, 2012 [1977]). In other words, balancing power is only one of several activities that great powers have, at times, engaged in.

We view great power management (GPM) as especially important for grasping the EU’s actorness in contemporary international politics. GPM has been generally neglected by IR theorists, especially when compared to the balance of power. It is generally associated with the work of Hedley Bull, for whom the preservation of order in the international system is the most important expectation constitutive of the great power role. Bull (2012 [1977]: 201–218) outlines six core expectations that, he believes, characterize how great powers carry out this function:

- 1) preservation of the general balance of power;
- 2) crisis avoidance;
- 3) war avoidance;
- 4) maintaining local preponderance;
- 5) establishing spheres of interest; and
- 6) engaging in great power concerts.

As Alexander Astrov, one of the few recent IR theorists to think seriously about GPM and its implications for world politics, notes (2011b: 2), “theoretical attention given to great power management is miniscule in comparison” to that paid to the other institutions of international society.<sup>7</sup> For Astrov (2011a), Bull’s “classical” conception of great power management requires updating if it is to be suitable for analysing contemporary global society. In his view, Bull’s account reflects a practice of great power intervention characteristic of nineteenth and early twentieth century diplomacy, which is centered on Westphalian notions of sovereign-equality, the balance of power, and regional spheres of influence. Astrov demonstrates the need to expand the meanings of GPM beyond Bull’s initial conceptualization through an analysis of the Russian-Georgian War of 2008. The Russian-Georgian



War highlights the inadequacy of traditional conceptualizations of GPM because it ended in the abject failure of Russian, EU, and American attempts at regional ordering.

Specifically, based on the work of Michel Foucault, GPM as an institution of contemporary international society is seen by Astrov (2011a: 22) to have a dualistic structure, which he labels *anarchical sovereignty* and *anarchical governance*. Alongside the classical ordering principle of sovereignty, another mode has come to the fore – a modern mode of governance centered on the ‘conduct of conduct’: a mode of power directed not to the use of direct coercion but the *policing* of citizens so as to nurture self-governing individuals in ways productive for the state (see also Burchill, Gordon and Miller, 1991).

Consequently, for Astrov (2011a: 15–16) GPM in contemporary world politics is not limited to the classical variety captured by Bull, but also includes “a ‘police’ mode of governing, whereby great powers ‘conduct the conduct’ of the rest of the international society, whose members, sovereign states, are posited by Westphalian arrangements as free individuals capable of conducting their own affairs” (see also Neumann and Sending, 2010). During the Russia-Georgia conflict of 2008, therefore, two modes of police governance were in operation: a non-liberal mode employed by Russia and a liberal one employed by the EU and the United States. The EU, in particular, attempted to deploy what is frequently described as its ‘soft’ power to further “milieu” goals as opposed to the “possession” goals sought by Moscow, in the terms of Arnold Wolfer’s famous formulation (Kobzova, Popescu and Wilson, 2011: 79).

Beyond this specific example, Astrov shows convincingly that GPM remains an influential practice in world politics but that its form has changed since Bull’s initial formulation. Importantly, understanding great power as a social role in international relations via an appreciation of GPM (as a mode of governance) moves us beyond considerations of whether a global actor *is* or *is not* a great power, to considerations of whether it is or is not *doing* great power management, and if so, *how*. In the following section, we assess the extent to which the EU is engaging in GPM, and whether this is of a classical or governmental variety. Before doing so, however, we address some important methodological considerations of role-based accounts of state action in international politics.

## How Do Roles Explain? GPM and the Performativity of Roles

A further reason for the tendency in IR to conceptualize great power as a status rather than a role is the difficulty associated with many social explanations of action, like those based on roles. Roles do not fully determine or cause observed action in the predominant understanding of causal inference in mainstream IR



and political science (e.g. King, Keohane and Verba, 1994; for an extended discussion see McCourt, 2014: 46–53). It is possible, for example, for someone playing the role of professor to let a student lead class on occasion and yet still be the professor, while the role of professor nevertheless explains much of what they do.

To critics, the idea that social roles explain action without determining it seems like a circular argument, a neat *description* of observed actions rather than a real *explanation*, or at best a *constitutive* explanation, but not a *causal* one (see Wendt, 1998). A long-standing solution to the problem of how social and normative features of world politics – norms, identities, roles, etc. – explain is to invoke the logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen, 1989: 23). From this perspective, socialized actors ‘fit’ their behaviour to expectations, rather than acting on cost-benefit analyses alone. The scholar’s task is thus to prove that an actor has internalized particular expectations. The logic of appropriateness, however, is in fact a problematic solution to the question of how normative features of world politics impact foreign policy-making. Not only does the logic of appropriateness move the analytical task into the unknowable sphere of individual consciousness, but it creates a false binary: *either* individuals – here state leaders – act for calculated strategic reasons (related to consequences) *or* they act in socially appropriate ways. Rather than being either/or, in practice, the two often go hand-in-hand.

If the logics of consequences and appropriateness are rejected as the proper basis for normative explanations of social behaviour, how then do roles explain social action? What is required to answer this question is a different way of understanding social action, one offered by certain, more radical, forms of constructivism. Such approaches see roles as fundamentally discursive and performative in nature, and therefore as based on neither consequentialist reasoning nor the search for appropriateness.

As David McCourt (2011a, 2012), among others, has shown, roles are sets of expectations about a state’s appropriate behaviour in a given situation, expectations that are embedded in discourses, understood as both language and practices – a state’s typical ways of doing things on the world stage (see also Bourbeau, 2017; Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Pouliot, 2008). McCourt (2014) explores how British elites and policy-makers have, since the end of the Second World War, been especially receptive to a discourse of great power-ness – of Britain as something more than a medium-sized regional power with a stake in international order broadly understood. Other important powers, in the British case especially France and the United States, have at crucial times participated in making meaningful what McCourt (2014: 2) calls Britain’s “residual great power” role. While this great power role discourse has not had automatic effects – consider its limited impact during the 2016 Brexit vote (see Glencross and McCourt, 2018) – it has significantly shaped British foreign pol-

icy-makers' decision-making over the last seven decades, despite its ongoing relative decline.

To grasp how such roles are constructed, it is useful to first reject a common misunderstanding of constructivist approaches in security studies. Luiza Bialasiewicz et al. (2007) have shown how discursive versions of constructivism are often misconstrued as denying the importance of material factors in world politics, like economic and military power. Constructivism is often mistakenly understood as an ideational approach to world politics: constructivism, it is frequently implied, suggests that what can be *thought* differently – e.g. Britain or the EU's role or identity in world politics – will *become* different. But such a view is actually a fundamental misreading of constructivism as an approach to IR (see Kratochwil, 2008). While constructivism foregrounds intersubjective meanings like roles, those meanings are not simply 'ideas.' Rather, they inhere in institutions, practices and rules, which are every bit as 'real' as the supposed concrete interests foregrounded by materialists.

Bialasiewicz et al. follow the work of Foucault and Judith Butler in utilizing the metaphor of *performativity* rather than *construction* to understand how institutions, practices, rules and roles underpin behaviour. "Understanding discourse as involving both the ideal and the material, the linguistic and the non-linguistic," they stress, "means that discourses are performative" (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007: 406). Understood in this way as fundamentally discursive constructions, social roles – here the role of great power – then can be seen to *constitute* international actors in world politics in particular ways.

For example, expectations that Britain will 'punch above its weight' in world politics take on greater significance in light of well-known concerns about it having 'lost an empire and not yet found a role' (see McCourt, 2014 and 2011b). This means that UK politicians are especially keen not to be seen as behaving as leaders of an 'ordinary' power, but one with global interests. These role terminologies are not thereby simply neutral descriptions of UK foreign policy. Rather, they are fundamentally part of the *performance* of Britain-in-the-world.

Once again, the important conceptual move is to replace the question of what states *are* – is the EU, or Britain, *really* a great or middle power? – with what states *do* and *are expected to do* within specific discursive contexts. As Bialasiewicz et al. go on (2007: 406, emphasis added), states do not *use* discourse; rather, "[s]tates are *made possible* by a wide range of discursive practices that include immigration policies, military deployments and strategies, cultural debates about normal social behavior, political speeches and economic investments." From this perspective, once again, the relevant issue in relation to the EU is not whether it *is* or *is not* a particular kind of actor – a great power – but whether its leaders and institutions are expected to behave in world politics in ways usefully captured by the analytical concept of great power – as modified above.

Roles thus convey expectations to policy-makers about appropriate action, and in so doing they indicate plausible political strategies for leaders to pursue. Below we use the role theoretic concepts of role-making and alter-casting – the adoption of policies and language by Ego designed to cast Alter into a complementary role – to frame our analysis of how great power role expectations are communicated in the EU case. But a recent literature in IR theory on the importance of *recognition* and *mutual recognition* in international relations is also instructive for understanding the performative nature of social roles, and could prove useful in further studies.<sup>8</sup> Scholars contributing to this literature have shown how states' search for recognition in international politics is every bit as much a basic drive of states as the search for security. Just as individuals tell stories about themselves to make their identities hang together, so too do states, and they – again like people – endeavor to have those stories recognized as truthful and meaningful by others (Ringmar, 2012: 6).

European Union leaders too seek to not merely play but come to be *recognized* as playing the role of a great power manager. What is at issue from a mutual recognition perspective is once again not what the EU *really is*, but whether EU leaders feel recognized and respected in the role they see themselves as expected to play. The EU, in turn, is a participant in processes of mutual recognition with other states and international actors around the world, from large actors like the US, Russia, and China – which we detail below – to lesser states still desirous of recognition as sovereign states, say countries in Africa and Central Asia.

Crucially, however, while performative in nature – *constituting* state action in a thicker sense than the metaphor of *construction* allows – roles do not fully determine state action in world politics. Other strategies remain possible for policy-makers; other performances can be made. Furthermore, roles are counterfactually valid. Consider, for example, the cross-cutting discourses of American foreign policy at the present time: on the one hand, the US's long-standing role of hegemon and global leader; on the other, American exceptionalism or isolationism, as evidenced by President Trump's rhetoric of "America First." The discourse of America's hegemon role remains prominent, even as Trump behaves in ways quite counter to it in response to imperatives from the discourse of America First. In the EU case, no internationalist discourse counter to the projection of power and influence described in the EUGS 2016 would seem to be evident.

Not all role performances are successful; nor are other role performances precluded in our understanding, it should also be stressed. Role performances can misfire, as – to take another British example – during the 1956 invasion of Egypt (see McCourt, 2014: 58–85), when the United States in particular disagreed with British leader Anthony Eden's assessment of what the great power role required of Britain should be following the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt. Built into role dis-

courses are normative expectations about how a role should and should not be played – and it does not follow that state leaders will always, or even typically, adhere to such normative cues.

Finally, it follows from role-based accounts of the actions of putative great powers that the analytical task facing the scholar is the interpretive one of grasping what the discourse of great power suggests is appropriate and required for an actor playing the role. Practically speaking, this means analysing public statements of the actor in question, and viewing them not as masks for other – presumably material – interests, but as performances of thick role-based expectations. The statements of other actors that contribute to the discourse of great power role-playing – important states as well as domestic audiences – are also an important part of the analysis. In the following section, therefore, we draw on published primary and secondary material to establish the plausibility of a great power role-based understanding of EU foreign and security policy, one centred on the practice of great power management.

### **THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A GREAT POWER MANAGER**

How far is the EU expected to engage in great power management in contemporary world politics? In this section we address first the *role-making* of EU leaders before switching to the expectations EU officials ‘take’ from key others to assess the role the EU is being alter-cast into. In addition, we examine the alter-casting the EU itself engages in, using insights from the logic of governmentality to show that conducting the conduct of states in international politics is the milieu goal of the union as a great power manager" or "to show that as a great power manager, the union has conducting the conduct of states in international politics as its milieu goal. Simply put, we find that – against theoretical common-sense as well as conventional wisdom – great power management practices are a crucial driver of the EU's contemporary behaviour in international affairs.

### **Making the Great Power Role for Europe**

Assertions by EU leaders of the necessity for Europe to play a large role on the international stage are commonplace. Unless we are to assume such language signifies a collective delusion in Brussels, it suggests EU policy makers perceive the EU to be rightfully engaged in many of the behaviours that are characteristic of great power managers in Bull's classical formulation: crisis management and conflict prevention, regional primacy, and the maintenance of the general balance and good relations with other major powers.

The existence of a large role for the EU to play on the world stage was laid out clearly in the 2003 *European Security Strategy* (EU, 2003), in which the EU is “in-  
evitably a global player [...] it should be ready to share in the responsibility for global

security and in building a better world" (ESS, 2003: 1). For former European Council President Herman Van Rompuy, "[i]t is [the EU's] responsibility and our duty, vis-à-vis ourselves and our children, to continue to shape the world of tomorrow" (2011: 9). Former High Representative for CFSP Catherine Ashton noted in May 2012 that "we will continue to do what the framers of the Lisbon Treaty – and long before them, Robert Schuman – intended; for Europe to play an active role in solving global problems" (2012: 2).

This mindset shows continuity across the EU foreign policy leadership changes. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs succeeding Ashton, Federica Mogherini, for example, told the UK think tank Chatham House, "the EU should be aware of its potential. [...] Sometimes I say the European Union is a superpower and some might doubt this. But we are a superpower if we combine our tools" (Mogherini, 2015: 6). What casts doubt on the plausibility of this assertion is the somewhat limited extent of European integration in foreign policy as compared with economic matters, the rise of non-European actors in world politics, and the internal cracks within the EU that produced (e.g.) the Brexit vote in the UK.

Nonetheless, these expansive statements on the EU's actorness rest on the claim that the world is changing and that it is imperative that the EU shape the international order in line with its own interests by assuming an appropriate role. As Van Rompuy stated in late 2010, "In this new world, which may offer us many surprises, we have to get and occupy our place" (2010: 9). For Ashton, "it is no longer 'our' world [...] we need the EU not just for us in Europe, but also as the vehicle to act in a fast-changing world and to influence its direction with our ideas" (Ashton, 2010: 3). Although the world is becoming "more and more a-polar, rather than bi-polar or multi-polar as we once thought it would become," Van Rompuy was, nonetheless, "convinced that Europe can play a role. It may sometimes not seem like it, but as a united force, our Union is a growing entity on the world stage" (Van Rompuy, 2013b: 3).

Statements such as these saying that the EU should be playing a significant role in the world are matched by frequently-made claims that the EU is *already* a big player, which invoke its status as the world's largest provider of development assistance, a key actor in the WTO, the world's major supporter of the International Criminal Court and the global fight against climate change, and the inspiration behind the formation of the G-20. However, these assertions are also accompanied by self-awareness of criticisms of the EU's weakness. "I know the EU (or Europe) is sometimes derided as somewhat of a 'Florence Nightingale,'" Van Rompuy told an audience in London. "But soft power is not a dirty word. And we don't just send nurses and nutritionists, we also send judges and policemen, we send soldiers and marines. We help build statehood, security, the rule of law" (Van Rompuy, 2013c: 3). In his view, the EU might not be a military power, but "military power is on the wane [...] among the democ-

racies with the biggest armies, we see [...] that their public opinions or parliaments further restrain the use of that force" (Van Rompuy, 2013a: 13).

The EU's disadvantages in lacking control over armed forces are therefore downplayed since "economic might counts for more" (Van Rompuy, 2013a: 13). This logic points to the method of great power management employed by the EU in terms of policing the conduct of other states rather than the traditional goals associated with a Bullian conception of managing international order. The EU's process of alter-casting involves inducing behavior from key partners so as to nurture a self-governing liberal order that the EU sees as strategically beneficial as well as normatively desirable. Indeed, a closer examination also reveals that this alter-casting even takes place within the EU, whereby member states and EU institutions seek to induce more active role-taking within international politics.

### **Is the EU Actually Doing Great Power Management (and How)?**

While indicative, these statements remain insufficient to support the claim that the EU really can be thought of as a great power manager. The self-understandings of EU policy-makers as playing the great power role have to be objectively meaningful too. Put simply, is the EU actually doing GPM? In this section, we use Bull's categories as a baseline for such an assessment, while also keeping in mind the dual structure – sovereignty and governmentality – of contemporary GPM.

#### *Crisis management and war limitation*

The main evidence for the EU as a crisis manager is its active engagement in international crises stretching from Iran's nuclear negotiations to Somali piracy, and to the civil wars in Ukraine and Syria. Although the negotiations over Tehran's nuclear ambitions only hit the headlines in 2009, they began 'bilaterally' between the EU, represented by the "EU-3" of the UK, France and Germany, and Iran in 2003 (Sauer, 2007: 613). After a chronicle of failure and prevarication, the talks then migrated to the International Atomic Energy Agency, and eventually to the UN Security Council in 2006. Since that time, the EU has been at the forefront of the negotiations that resulted in July 2015's Iran nuclear deal.

The Iran deal, which was subsequently plunged into disarray by the election of Donald Trump (Kroenig, 2018), bore the hallmarks of governmentality. The agreement came about following the coordination of sanctions to change Tehran's behaviour, accompanied by a series of phased-in economic incentives to stick to the arrangement. The EU's attempts to maintain the deal in the wake of the American withdrawal further showcases this policing logic. Instead of siding with Trump to resort to coercion for further concessions, the EU's response has been to seek to maintain the beneficial economic ties designed to induce Iran to limit its nuclear weapons



programme. This ambition requires in turn the as-yet untested ability to limit extra-territorial US sanctions on EU companies.

Further evidence of the EU's engagement in GPM is provided by Europe's involvement in combating piracy off the coast of Somalia. In response to the worsening situation, the UNSC invoked its chapter VII prerogatives to mandate an anti-piracy mission, beginning in 2008. As part of this mission, the EU launched Operation ATALANTA to protect shipping lanes around the Gulf of Aden as well as World Food Program convoys (Riddervold, 2011). This deployment (some 2000 personnel) takes place alongside Combined Task Force 151, which is headed by the US, NATO Operation *Allied Protector* and autonomous maritime deployments by Russia and China. Consequently, the EU is a fully-fledged participant in the UN-led management of threats to the peace, an endeavour traditionally delegated to great powers.

The EU has been drawn into two major regional conflicts in the past decade: Syria and Ukraine. While these crises have illustrated a number of limitations in the EU's international clout, they have also served to demonstrate the EU's GPM approach. That approach is based on accepting international responsibilities, as when the EU enacted sanctions on the Syrian regime at the request of the US and the Arab League of States and joined the Action Group for Syria alongside China, Russia and the US (Turkmani, 2018). Equally, the GPM favoured by the EU entails attempts to induce changes in the behaviour of state parties in these conflicts, from sanctioning Russian companies and individuals linked to the annexation of Crimea, to providing financial assistance for Turkey to control migrants crossing its border into the EU (Lehner, 2018).

### *Regional order and spheres of influence*

In relation to the creation and maintenance of regional orders and spheres of influence, it is clear that the EU has achieved something akin to the first objective at least. The EU is, in essence, a regional ordering process that seeks to police the behaviour of neighbouring states by locking in citizens within those countries to the principles of an EU-led order. Its principal mechanisms are the list of conditions attached to accession (Grabbe, 2005) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Barbé and Johansson-Nogués, 2008), which are deployed to induce change in government policies and develop forms of supranational loyalty out of self-interest. Launched in 2004, the ENP (see European External Action Service, 2015) has the stated aim to promote stability, security and prosperity in countries close to Europe, and includes political association, trade agreements and financial incentives. The dangle of visa-free travel for candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as neighbours not seen as potential members, notably, is a way to create domestic pressure on governments to provide reforms in line with EU expectations of good governance.



Here the alter-casting process is structured around defining conduct that befits or deviates from EU norms and seeking to nurture acceptance of those norms across the populations of states whose principal economic and political relationship is with Brussels.

The EU's commitment to regional stabilization and crisis-management is demonstrated in its post-conflict role in Georgia, where the EU leads the sole international monitoring mission, the EUMM. The mission's aim is "to ensure that there is no return to hostilities, to facilitate the resumption of a safe and normal life[,...]to build confidence among the parties and to inform EU policy in Georgia and the wider region" (EUMM, 2018). More consequentially, the EU has sought to gain control over the process of stabilizing its most hazardous neighbouring region: the Balkans. A stabilizing mission run by the EU took over responsibility for providing security in Bosnia from NATO in 2004 (Menon, 2009). At the same time, by sponsoring direct bilateral talks between Serbia and Kosovo, the EU has thus established a preponderant role for itself in the maintenance of the regional order, which is no mean feat given the divisions that made a decisive military response impossible in the early 1990s (see especially Rathbun, 2004).

Beyond accession and the ENP, the EU's main ordering capacities lie within the sphere of economics. Perhaps the most significant recent challenge to the regional order within the EU – and hence to the claim that it is engaged in great power management – is the sovereign debt crisis (2010-) occasioned by the global financial meltdown of 2008. From the start, economists had strong doubts about whether the countries involved met the criteria for an optimum currency area, especially as the Euro brought high-end exporting countries (notably Germany) together with others whose economic performance was determined by domestic demand (peripheral countries such as Portugal and Greece) (see Mankiw, 2015). Yet when member states using the Euro became frozen out of the capital markets, the EU undertook unprecedented steps to shore up the single currency, while imposing unprecedented controls on domestic sovereignty over budgetary affairs. From a GPM perspective, this process is best understood as a form of alter-casting internal to the EU. Also noteworthy here are the attempts of Germany and the Netherlands to make a role for themselves within the EU as the guardians of fiscal discipline. In other words, for the EU to function externally as a participant in GPM, it is imperative to control the conduct of its member states, especially the fiscal policies of those that use the Euro even though the outcome has been contested in a number of Eurozone countries (see Glencross, 2014).

There is strong evidence, therefore, that Europe is engaged in great power management along two dimensions of the framework developed above: crisis and war avoidance; and the maintenance of local preponderance and the creation of spheres of influence. The final task is to assess the third component: the management of bi-

lateral relations with other great powers – Russia, China and the US – and the maintenance of the general balance in the international system. This provides the opportunity to assess the extent to which these actors are communicating to EU leaders the expectation that Europe should engage in GPM. In large measure, the leading states are treating the EU as a fellow great power manager.

## **Alter-casting the EU into a Great Power Role: Bilateral Relations and the General Balance**

### *Russia*

The EU first negotiated a formal bilateral mechanism of cooperation with Russia in 1994, which came into force in 1997 (Timmermann, 1996). This Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) committed member states to pursue common economic and political objectives with Russia through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Between 1999 and 2004, the EU pursued a unilateral ‘Common Strategy for Russia’ under the legal framework of the CFSP made possible by the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) (Forsberg, 2004). This strategy was supposed to commit EU member states to coordinate their foreign policies towards Russia with the aim of consolidating democracy, market reforms and the rule of law in the latter. Since 2005 both sides have been seeking a replacement for the 1997 PCA, with no final agreement as yet although formal political dialogue between them is frequent: there are biannual summits, Russian Government-European Commission meetings, a Permanent Partnership Council involving ministerial-level representation, and an inter-parliamentary Cooperation Committee.

There is, therefore, evidence that Russia begrudgingly accepts the EU’s role as a manager of international politics, with trade and energy particularly salient issue-areas in their relations. Russia has thus taken a keen interest in developments in European integration since the end of the Cold War, pursuing an active engagement with a view to managing the international order. In the aftermath of the NATO intervention in Kosovo, Russia actively courted security cooperation through the nascent ESDP, which was rightly interpreted as benign towards its interests (Forsberg, 2004). Initially, Russia hoped that the ESDP would reduce NATO’s influence on the continent, although this perception soon waned in light of EU countries’ unwillingness to break with America (Rontoyanni, 2002). Nevertheless, in the 2000s, Russia continued to seek to institutionalize the cooperation within ESDP decision-making, notably through the call for the creation of an analogue to the NATO-Russia Council.

This is not to say that cooperation has at all times been the name of the game. On matters such as energy policy or relations with former Soviet satellites, Russia has played the divide and rule card by privileging bilateral relations with individual EU countries. (Rontoyanni, 2002) This approach is evident in Russia’s 2009 withdrawal from the Energy Charter Treaty, which served to lessen its formal cooperation with

the EU on energy (Leonard and Popescu, 2007). Moreover, Russia has attempted to scupper the EU-financed Nabucco gas pipeline through the development of a rival Gazprom initiative (South Stream). However, all of this suggests that Russia – again, begrudgingly – takes seriously the EU's role as a great power manager.<sup>9</sup>

### *The United States*

Of the existing major powers, the US has been the most ambivalent towards engaging with the EU as a great power manager. Rhetorically, the American ambivalence was most obvious in the prelude to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, where Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld sought to divide “Old and New Europe.” It was also on display during the creation of a ‘coalition of the willing’ specifically for the Iraq invasion, a device that allowed the US administration to bypass the EU in favour of bilateral relations with individual nation-states. But while on the face of it surprising, the US ambivalence becomes more understandable when viewed in role terms as a related to conflict between the hegemon and the potential actions of a great power firmly within its hegemonic orbit. Put simply, not only must US leaders balance relations with Brussels against important relations with European capitals, but America must also police the boundaries of European action independent of itself, the hegemon. Once again, in so doing, Washington provides evidence that the EU is increasingly engaging in great power management.

Most concretely, during the run-up to the Lisbon Treaty, the US administration manoeuvred to ensure that the nascent EU Constitutional Treaty did not encroach upon NATO competences. In this way, the US clearly articulated a policy of defending its interest in preserving regional leadership in Europe within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. Since 1998, the US has explicitly articulated three redlines that must not be breached in the context of EU-NATO relations: no *decoupling* from NATO, no *duplication* of NATO command structures or alliance-wide resources, and no *discrimination* against NATO members that are not EU members (Archick and Gallis, 2005). The 2003 proposal by France, Germany, Belgium, and Luxembourg to create a European military headquarters in Belgium was interpreted in Washington as a breach of these redlines. This led the US to lobby hard for the insertion into the EU Constitutional Treaty of a formal recognition of “compatibility” between the EU security and defence cooperation and NATO (Article I-41.2; see Cimbalo, 2004).

Nevertheless, the transatlantic divergence over Iraq did not preclude the US from seeking to engage with the EU over a variety of crucial security issues: counter-terrorism measures as well as both Iraqi and Afghan stabilization. On the former, the US sought out a cooperation with the EU to devise common measures on sharing airline passenger data, screening cargo, and the extradition of terrorist suspects. On the question of stabilizing post-conflict Iraq and Afghanistan, the US sought to cooperate with the EU, resulting in the disbursement of economic assistance through

the auspices of the European Commission. Significant monies were pledged during the 2002 Tokyo Conference, the 2004 Berlin Conference, and the 2006 London Conference, taking EU development assistance to 8 billion euros (including member state contributions) for the period 2002–2010.

### *China*

EU-China summitry is often dismissed as inconsequential (see Bailes and Wetter, 2007). Since it is a latecomer to international security cooperation, it is perhaps not surprising that China's bilateral desire to engage on security matters with the distant EU should be somewhat limited. China is the state with the most realistic claim to being a great power in the current international system. But it is also the one with the least historically and institutionally sedimented relationship with Europe. Despite this, the two actors' bilateral relations have grown significantly since the signing of the Lisbon Treaty. In the wake of the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis the Chinese government has stressed its preference for a strong Euro as an alternative reserve currency to the dollar, leading to its purchases of national debt across the Eurozone. In terms of security cooperation, the bilateral coordination pushed by China is very limited. A 2004 summit produced an EU-Chinese Joint Declaration on Non-Proliferation and Arms Control, which has resulted in regular consultations at expert level.

### *Great Power Concerts*

The final aspect of GPM relates to the extent of European participation in great power concerts. Here the question of Europe's identity and its recognition as a great power manager emerges sharply: is the EU more akin to a state, or an international organization? On the one hand, the EU represents a complex concert of the former European great powers. On the other, since the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, the EU has been given the ability to participate in discussions with formal and informal groups, most notably the G7/8/20 and the UN Security Council. Again, the question of whether the EU *can be* a great power here can be put to one side in favour of assessing whether Europe is being accepted, or recognized, as a great power manager in international affairs.

Not surprisingly, the EU's engagement with great power concerts is strongest in the economic sphere. The EU is now an accepted participant in the meetings of the G7/8 and the G20. Formally the G7 comprises the US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. However, the EU is a *de facto* eighth member, having participated in it since 1981 as a so-called 'nonenumerated' member, and today participating fully in the meetings of finance ministers that take place during the G7 summits. The EU is more formally a member of the currently defunct G8 (the G7 plus Russia) and, more consequentially, the G20, which has assumed prominence in global economic and financial cooperation since the Financial Crisis of 2008.

Of more interest is the EU's growing representation at the foremost concert of existing great powers: the United Nations. What is significant is that although in the UN, the EU has an observer status only – which puts it on a par with entities such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and the Common Fund for Commodities – the EU has gradually gained capacities reserved for states; an Assembly resolution of May 2011, for example, allows the EU to present common positions (see European Union, 2011). Crucially, the Security Council itself has repeatedly sought to work with the EU despite the fact that there is a very limited legal basis for formal EU representation within the UN. Thus, although the EU's presence in these great power forums remains unique alongside the more long-standing powers, Europe is increasingly accepted as a partner at the top table of great power politics.

### **CONCLUSION: GREAT POWER IS (EXPECTED) AS GREAT POWER DOES**

In this paper we have revisited the concept of great power via an analysis of the EU's expanding capabilities in international security and diplomacy, arguing that much can be gained from explicitly conceptualizing great power as a social role rather than a status. Without rejecting the importance of status-seeking, we have shown how, understood as a role, great power expectations go a long way toward explaining the EU's curious 'actorness,' despite its non-state nature and developments like Brexit.<sup>10</sup> Linking this reconceptualization to the notion of great power management, notably the recent reconsiderations of that concept by Astrof (2011a), we have argued that much is gained for our understanding of contemporary international order and the actions of other great powers and potential great powers through this reconceptualization.

Europe's institutional mechanisms and policy ambitions for playing a significant role in international security and diplomacy are matched by the willingness of non-European UN Security Council permanent members to co-opt the EU into the management of international affairs. The EU, we have shown, is both *doing* great power management and is increasingly *expected* to do so. Our focus on what the EU is being expected to do is crucial, however. Those critical of viewing the EU in great power terms might respond to our argument by protesting its divided nature. The EU-3 and the former great powers of France, Germany, and, until Brexit happens, Britain remain more significant power bases in Europe. They might also point to failures and inefficiencies in EU diplomacy and foreign policy as evidence that the EU *cannot really* be a great power. Yet, we have attempted to remain consistently analytical – rather than normative – about our deployment of the concepts of great power and great power management. We make no claims about the *quality* of the EU's foreign policy; we only point out that EU leaders feel and consistently express – for better or worse – that the

Union has a rightful place in the management of important issues and crises in world politics.

It follows from this paper, therefore, that future research on EU foreign and security policy should not begin from and end at the issue of Europe's capacity and intentions, but should pay significant attention to the expectations being communicated to EU leaders, and whether they continue or shift the tendencies explored here. What do other great power managers, like China and the hegemon the United States, want from the EU? What do other actors in the international system, like citizens, global NGOs and corporations, expect from the EU? It is they who will shape the contexts in which the EU acts internationally.

To conclude with only one line of investigation, following Astrov's fruitful reconceptualization of Hedley Bull's original English School formulation of GPM – away from a classical understanding of GPM toward management based on the conducting of the conduct of 'lesser' states and other global actors – the paper has highlighted an important tension in EU foreign and security policy that is worthy of consideration. As a body composed of liberal democratic states and constructed along liberal lines, the EU is expected to conduct itself on the global stage in a liberal manner – seeking 'milieu goals' and changes in the nature of governance in lesser actors rather than the blunt use of hard military and economic power. The question arises, however, of whether the EU will be able to maintain such a liberal form of governance in an international order increasingly populated by illiberal powers such as Russia and China. Is French President Emmanuel Macron's recent call for a "real, true European army" (BBC, 2019) an early signal of a change in viewpoint among European elites, according to which the time has come to equip Europe – whether within the EU or without – with the capacity to conduct illiberal police actions in furtherance of GPM or GPM as more classically understood by Bull?

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Alongside Astrov (2011), a few recent works are noteworthy in what seems like a nascent revival of the concept. See in particular the work of Benjamin Zala (2017). See also Cui and Buzan (2016), Goh (2016), Quayle (2018), Little (2006), Kopra (forthcoming, 2019), and Wehner (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Crucially, for example, the United States – particularly since the end of the Cold War, but likely well before that – has not played the role of a *great power* in world politics, but one more accurately conceptualized as a *hegemon* role – the principal difference being the primarily regional nature of the influence of great powers and the global character of hegemons. The hegemon role thus clashes in important ways with the great power role, and especially the attempts of others – notably Russia and China – to play the great power role in a non-liberal mode, or, in the latter case, to potentially adopt the global role of a hegemon.

<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing us to make this point clearly, and from whom we have borrowed some language directly.



- <sup>4</sup> See also Bull's (1980) scathing assessment of the job America and the Soviet Union had done of managing international society in their era of stewardship.
- <sup>5</sup> See Goddard and Nexon (2005) for a discussion of how, while defining great power as a status, Waltz ends up importing a vision of states as playing the role of enemy to every other state from the systems theory of sociologist Talcott Parsons. This provides further evidence that great power cannot, in fact, be understood as principally or solely a status.
- <sup>6</sup> These concepts do not exhaust the theoretical lexicon of role-theory and are thereby not the only role-associated concepts that could shed light on great power role-playing in international politics. In particular, as discussed further below, the notion of *mutual recognition* seems to represent a fruitful alternative to the concept of alter-casting for exploring how states are mutually constituted through role-based interaction (see especially Lindemann and Ringmar, 2012).
- <sup>7</sup> This relative neglect of GPM is surprising, however, given the fact that Waltz himself devoted an entire chapter (Chapter 9) of *Theory of International Politics* to the subject. There Waltz makes clear that as the big winners in international politics, great powers have a particularly large stake in the stability of the system. "[G]reat power," he claims (1979: 195), "gives its possessors a big stake in their system and the ability to act for its sake. For them management becomes both worthwhile and possible."
- <sup>8</sup> See Lindemann and Ringmar (2012) for a good overview. Also see Lindemann (2010); Murray (2018); and the symposium in *International Theory*, 5(1) (2013): 94–176.
- <sup>9</sup> One might also consider Russian trolling and online disruption as forms of great power management; see Kurowska and Reshetnikov (2018).
- <sup>10</sup> See especially Bretherton and Vogler (2006). For a thorough and insightful review of the concept's history, see Drieskens (2016).

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