

Security Cooperation in EU–China Relations: Towards Convergence?*

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Over the past decade, the EU and China have expanded their relations beyond a focus on economic and trade issues into the sphere of security. This is particularly evident when security is seen to encompass a variety of policy domains – from traditional, military security to non-traditional human security. However, this development has not followed an even or linear path: the record of EU–China security cooperation has been varied across different policy domains, with distinct temporal trajectories. This article addresses the question of why security cooperation between the two sides has advanced in certain policy domains while having faltered in others. Based on an expert survey of European and Chinese scholars, we explore both interest-driven and experience-driven explanations. Our analysis identifies a number of key events in the development of EU–China relations that have been critical in terms of initiating and enhancing cooperation in specific domains. Overall, we find that past experience with actual cooperation, rather than declared intentions, best explains the pattern of cooperation over time.

1 INTRODUCTION

What factors best explain the level of cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the People’s Republic of China in matters of security? Even with evident variation over time as well as across security domains, the large number of EU–China dialogues makes this a relevant question. In our analysis, the focus will be on China’s relations with the EU rather than with individual Member States. After all, even noting the limited room of manoeuvre given competing interests and actions of its Member States, the EU has emerged in recent years as a relevant security

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actor with a distinct foreign and security policy and a corresponding administration (the European External Action Service or EEAS) dedicated to promoting EU interests and values abroad. Moreover, the EU and China signed a ‘strategic partnership’ in 2003, and adopted a ‘2020 strategic agenda for cooperation’ in 2013. These agreements resulted from a mutual commitment to cooperation and signal an interest to further advance ties.

It is important, in this context, to acknowledge the overwhelming weight of great power politics. Relations between the US and China, as major global powers, tends to limit attention on the often more mundane interactions between China and the EU. While this should not make the latter less pertinent, it does, however, suggest limits to the application of traditional approaches and concepts, such as balancing and power-transition, to EU–China relations which is why in this article we make use of a framework focused more on perceptions, experience and interaction.

In contrast to the large amount of studies focusing on US–China relations, there is only limited scholarly interest in EU–China security relations. A first objective of this article is therefore to provide an inventory of the kind of cooperation that has occurred across a range of traditional and non-traditional security dimensions. Following Most and Starr,¹ opportunities and constraints are seen as structuring security cooperation. Hence, a second objective is to identify key opportunities and to evaluate how, if at all, they explain patterns of cooperation. We expect that opportunities for cooperation vary, and that actual collaboration faces more or less serious challenges. Finally, we reflect on how individual EU Member States as well as global politics impose constraints on the development of EU–China security relations.

Arguably the delegation of authority from the Member States to the EU is still limited which may constrain EU–China cooperation, but over time the authority of the EU versus its Member States has increased. The increased economic and military capabilities of the China are even more striking. Whereas the former should be generally promote EU–China security cooperation simply because the EU has become a more relevant partner, the effect of the so-called ‘rise of China’ is more mixed. On the one hand, China has taken on a more prominent role in global security as shown in non-proliferation, peace-keeping, and climate change. At the same time, it is also increasingly challenging the status quo, for example, in the South-China Sea and in other regional security issues.

As is commonly recognized, the EU and China have long been major trading partners and have, in recent years, also become significant investors in each other’s

¹ B. A. Most & H. Starr, *Inquiry, Logic, and International Politics* (University of South Carolina 1989).

economies. Apart from direct economic ties, the EU and China share an interest in an open, stable and good-functioning world economy. The spillover of shared economic interests into the security realm has commonly been cited as the main reason for security cooperation between the EU and China.² From this perspective, economics not only determines the extent of security relations but also their particular nature. The EU–China Trade and Cooperation Agreement, concluded in 1985, still provides the fundamental legal agreement between both sides. Accordingly, security dialogues are said to focus on economic security and protecting economic interests, and economic interests have acquired particular prominence given the absence of pressing security concerns. Notably, the EU and China do neither perceive each as enemies or potential military threats, nor does the ‘rise of China’ have an immediate impact on EU interests. Even when EU officials worry about the impact of a more assertive China – for example in the South–China sea – on security in East and South-east Asia, this does not necessarily mean that the EU has a meaningful role to play.

The willingness to cooperate results however not only from shared interests but also from a common understanding of the problems at hand as well as appropriate and feasible solutions. In this context, actual experiences with cooperation are particularly relevant in shaping the space for collaboration. Experience-based explanations emphasize learning and socialization as key elements for the diffusion of cooperation. By comparing security relations across domains as well as over time, we can evaluate the relative relevance of interests and experience. Empirically, we evaluate security cooperation between 1989 and 2015³ across ten policy dimensions, namely: military security, proliferation and non-proliferation, regional security, cyber-security, terrorism and organized crime, human security, civil protection, migration, climate change and energy security, and economic security. The EU–China Strategic Partnerships has shaped cooperation across all these dimensions – and contrasts with events such as the Tiananmen Square massacre (1989) that burdened relations across the board. Other events had a much more specific impact; for example, the impact of EU assistance following the Wenchuan earthquake (2008) on civil protection.

In the following section we survey existing theoretical approaches on EU–China security relations, contrasting interest- and experience-based explanations and exploring implications for cooperation across dimensions and over time. The third section outlines the framework of expert survey of European and Chinese

² See M. Smith & H. Xie, *The European Union and China: The Logics of ‘Strategic Partnership’*, 6 J. Contemp. Eur. Res. 432 (2010).

³ The time period coincides with the EU developing a common foreign and security policy, and the agreement on China–EU strategic partnerships in 2003 and extended in 2010.

scholars at the heart of this study. The fourth section presents the key results that are discussed further in the Conclusions.

2 PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY COOPERATION

The existing literature provides two useful starting points to think about what motivates and constrains security cooperation between the EU and China. First of all, there are extensive scholarly debates within the field of International Relations about why states cooperate.⁴ Here, interests, perceptions and institutions provide useful organizing principles.⁵ Alternatively, EU–China relations can be seen as a special case of an emerging European foreign policy.⁶ The latter literature tends to be more policy-oriented and to follow either a Constructivist or (Historical) Institutional approach.

Table 1 provides a brief summary of the key theoretical positions and conceptual contributions with regards to opportunities and constraints. Further, it applies these concepts to EU–China relation to highlight key variation across issue dimensions and time. Exogenously determined interests underlie both Realist and Liberal approaches where a narrow respectively broad definition of security interests is the key distinguishing factor. Constructivist approaches draw attention to the role of perception and social interaction in the formation of preferences. Institutionalism approaches highlight path-dependency as well as critical events or junctures.

The Realist understanding of the international system emphasizes sovereignty and ‘self-help’, thereby limiting the room for bilateral cooperation in security matters. Cooperation is conditional on the presence of an immediate security threat – e.g. when facing a common enemy – or shared security interests in dealing with third parties – e.g. when providing personnel to UN peacekeeping operations. Accordingly, balancing and ‘bandwagoning’ provide opportunities for cooperation. A key constraint is the risk of entanglement underscoring the potential costs of collaboration. Hence, cooperation is generally regarded as being highly conditional, and issue- and time-contingent. Security is seen as ‘high’ politics, most obviously in case of cooperation on military and regional security, proliferation and non-proliferation, and international terrorism. Yet also in other areas threats towards the state may emerge, for example, around issues such as cyber- and human security, and if so security cooperation will remain weak. In ‘low’ politics domains such as economics, civil protection and climate policies, joint action is more feasible, but Realists question whether these policy domains concern state security.

⁴ *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (K. A. Oye ed., Princeton University Press 1986).

⁵ R. Axelrod & R. O. Keohane, *Achieving Cooperation Under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions*, in Oye (ed.), *supra* n. 4, at 226–254.

⁶ S. Bersick, *The EU’s Bilateral Relations with China*, in *The Sage Handbook of European Foreign Policy* vol. 2, 615–633 (K. E. Jørgensen, Å. K. Aarstad, E. Drieskens, K. Lattikainen & B. Tonra eds, Sage 2015).

Liberals see possible mutual gains and opportunities for cooperation across the full security domain. Given increasing trade and investment flows, the Chinese and European economies have become increasingly interconnected, putting economic security central to the EU–China relations. Closer economic ties affect other security domains such as immigration but also increased risks of the spread of diseases such as the H5N1 (bird flu) virus linking economic security to civil protection. Because of their direct responsibility for the single European market, EU institutions have acquired broad responsibilities to act on such issues.⁷ Shared interest in a stable global order creates further opportunities for collaboration on regional security (e.g. via the ASEAN Regional Forum, ARF) and non-proliferation. External events, such as the global financial crisis after 2009, the prospect of Brexit, and the changing US foreign policy of the Trump Presidency, all have a major impact on EU–China relations.

Table 1 Approaches to EU–China Security Cooperation

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Security Cooperation Opportunity</i>	<i>Constraint</i>	<i>Variation Issue</i>	<i>Temporal</i>
<i>Realist</i>	Balancing	Entanglement	High versus Low Politics	‘Rise of China’
<i>Liberal</i>	Common interests	Divergence of democratic norms	Issue specific from trade interest to human rights	Global financial crisis and risks to global trade
<i>Constructivist</i>	Shared perceptions and understandings	Misunderstandings and conceptual gaps	Issue specific from global order to post-modern values	EU institutionalization and crises.
<i>Institutionalist</i>	Density of institutional framework and structuring agreements	Lack of history in EU–China security relations	Policy and institutional diffusion	Path dependency and critical junctures

⁷ Details are provided in H. Dorussen, E. Fanoulis & E. J. Kirchner, *The EU as a Regulator of Civil Security Across Europe*, in *EU Civil Security Governance: Diversity and Cooperation in Crisis and Disaster Management* 211–232 (H. Hegemann & R. Bossong eds, Palgrave 2015); and E. J. Kirchner, E. Fanoulis & H. Dorussen, *Civil Security in the EU: National Persistence Versus EU Ambitions?*, 24 Eur. Sec. 287 (2015).

Depending on the specific security issue under consideration, EU and Chinese interests may thus be more aligned, making it easier to achieve collaboration, or more opposed, making it harder to do so. The EU and China, moreover, often do not share a common normative understanding of the global international order; for example, with respect to democracy, the rule of law and human rights. This lack of normative agreement may constitute an important constraint on the further development of EU–China security relations, but do not necessarily and always impede it. Neo-liberal institutionalism points at the relevance of institutions to provide linkages across issue domains. Institutions can also be designed to monitor and, if necessary, sanction agreements.⁸ Accordingly, the increased involvement of the EU and China in bi- and multilateral agreements is seen as pertinent.

Also from a Constructivist perspective, opportunities for cooperation present themselves across the full domain of security issues. Rather than exogenously determined alignment of interests, for Constructivists the ability of actors to forge such an alignment matters.⁹ Differences between the perceptions and conceptual understanding of key elements for security collaboration (such as sovereignty, human rights) and international norms (such as a Responsibility to Protect) are seen as important constraints,¹⁰ while the ability to overcome such differences presents valuable opportunities.

For the EU, its normative understanding is seen as particularly important for its ambitions to build security relationships with other states, including with China. Smith and Xie argue that three core logics explain the EU interest in strategic partnerships. First, the *integration logic* suggests that the need for an external policy is a ‘spillover or the projection of internal needs’.¹¹ The (dis)similarity of interests and preferences of the EU Member States affect opportunities for advancing a common interest. Secondly, an *external logic* emphasizes the pressures and opportunities arising from broader international structures. Thirdly, the *identity logic* explains the search of strategic partnerships as ‘bound up with the search of a European identity, and thus with the generation of images and understandings of the EU itself, both within and outside the Union’.¹² They conclude:

⁸ B. Koremenos, C. Lipson & D. Snidal, *The Rational Design of International Institutions*, 55 *Int’l Org.* 761, 787–791 (2001); and H. Dorussen & E. J. Kirchner, *Better a Good Neighbor than a Distant Friend: The Scope and Impact of Regional Security Organizations*, 14 *Int’l Rel. Asia-Pac.* 117, 121–122 (2014).

⁹ D. Kerr & L. Fei, *The International Politics of EU-China Relations* (Oxford University Press 2007).

¹⁰ Z. Pan, *Managing the Conceptual Gap on Sovereignty in China-EU Relations*, 8 *Asia Eur. J.* 227 (2010); and J.-C. Gottwald & N. Duggan, *Diversity, Pragmatism and Convergence: China, the European Union and the Issue of Sovereignty*, in *Conceptual Gaps in China-EU Relations. Global Governance, Human Rights and Strategic Partnerships* 35–49 (Z. Pan ed., Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

¹¹ Smith & Xie, *supra* n. 2, at 435.

¹² *Ibid.*, at 435.

the search for an EU China ‘strategic partnership’ reflects the perception in key EU institutions that the Union has a role in introducing China to the global order and ensuring that the Chinese play by the rules of global society (as interpreted by the EU). We should of course also note that this perception has often been met by an equally firm Chinese perception that they will do things their own way, and by their capacity to resist or reject the EU’s presumption.¹³

Accordingly, differences in perceptions and the ability of key Chinese and EU actors to overcome such differences, or convergence, should largely explain variation in opportunities for cooperation. Development (and crises) of EU institutions is seen as most pertinent for any temporal variation in efforts to achieve EU–China collaboration.

Since 2003, EU–China relations have become increasingly institutionalized.¹⁴ There are regular EU–China Summits and efforts to negotiate a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. From 2013 as part of the EU–China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, negotiations have been held on a EU–China bilateral investment agreement. The prospects for a China–EU bilateral investment agreement are being explored since 2012. Institutionalism emphasizes the opportunities the increased density of such agreements offer for future collaboration.¹⁵ Whereas initially dialogues and agreements focus on the most salient issues (in the case of EU–China primarily economic ties), cooperation is expected to diffuse to strategic and security domains – for example the High-Level Strategic Dialogues within the 2020 Strategic Agenda. Studying EU–China engagement with peacekeeping, Cottey and Duggan (2016) argue that increased experience with collaboration on the ground has promoted security collaboration more generally.¹⁶

In spite of the impressive network of EU–China interactions, from this perspective there are clear limits to the development of security cooperation.¹⁷ First of all, there is a relative ‘lack of history’ in EU–China diplomatic relations; they exist only for about forty years and a strategic partnership only since 2003. The European External Action Service is also a very ‘young player’ internationally. Finally, there is a legacy of more problematic engagements: the 1989 events surrounding Tiananmen Square and the continuing European arms embargo against the PRC, and the denial of market economy status for the PRC.

¹³ *Ibid.*, at 444.

¹⁴ T. Christiansen, *A Liberal Institutional Perspective on China-EU Relations*, in *China, the European Union and International Politics of Global Governance* 29–50 (J. Wang & W. Song eds, Palgrave 2016).

¹⁵ D. Shambaugh, *China and Europe: The Emerging Axis*, 103 *Current Hist.* 243 (2004).

¹⁶ A. Cottey & N. Duggan, *China-EU Relations in Global Security Governance. A Study of Sino-EU Cooperation and Conflict in United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping*, Paper presented at the UACES 46th Annual Conference (London 5–7 Sept. 2016).

¹⁷ J. Holslag, *The Elusive Axis: Assessing the EU–China Strategic Partnership*, 49 *J. Common Mkt. Stud.* 293 (2011).

In summary, analyses of EU–China security cooperation can be distinguished between interest-driven (broadly Realist and Liberal) and experience-driven (broadly Constructivist and Institutionalist). A further distinction is between a narrowly conceived security agenda (in line with Realist and, less clearly, Institutionalist approaches) and a broad security agenda (Liberal and Constructivist). Table 2 outlines the expectations of these perspectives on the pattern and development of EU–China security relations. The classification identifies specific expectations for EU–China security cooperation across policy domains as well as its development of time, and will guide the empirical analysis in the following sections.

Table 2 Classification of Expectations for EU–China Security Cooperation

		<i>Security Domain</i>	
		<i>Specific</i>	<i>Encompassing</i>
<i>Temporal</i>	<i>Interest-Driven</i>	(Realist): limited opportunities for cooperation with cumulative structural constraints limiting joint action	(Liberal): general opportunities for cooperation with issue specific variation in structural constraints supporting joint action
	<i>Experience-Drive</i>	(Institutionalist): limited opportunities for cooperation, but increasing joint actions within specific domains	(Constructivist): general and opportunities for cooperation with joint action diffusing across domains

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

We rely in our analysis and evaluation of EU–China security relations on a survey of European and Chinese scholars. These experts in specific security domains collaborated in their assessment.¹⁸ As part of the EU funded research project

¹⁸ In total twenty-five experts were identified for their knowledge regarding specific issue domains. The experts represent a variety of theoretical and epistemological approaches. All experts are scholars working at universities and policy institutes in Australia, Belgium, China, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Singapore, and the UK. For any particular issue domain, the European and Chinese scholars collaborated in the formulation and assessment of their assessments. The demarcation of the various policy domains was agreed upon at the workshops. In-depth analysis of each security domain can be found in the contributions to *Security Relations Between China and the European Union. From Convergence to Cooperation?* (E. J. Kirchner, T. Christiansen & H. Dorussen eds, Cambridge University Press 2016).

EU–China Security Cooperation, we convened four workshops in 2014 and 2015 bringing them together to discuss a common framework for analysis and to enhance cooperation between the European and Chinese scholars.

The analysis covers a range of traditional and non-traditional security dimensions. The ten selected areas are: military security, regional security, nuclear proliferation, terrorism and organized crime, climate and energy security, human security, civil protection, cyber security, economic security, and migration and immigration. These dimensions are explicitly referred to in both Chinese official policy papers as well as key EU documents such as the 2003 European Security Strategy and its 2008 Implementation Report.

In contrast with most existing studies, the focus of the analysis is on EU–China relations rather than ‘Sino–European’ security relations. Similarly, the focus is on direct EU–China relations instead of placing these relations in light of a third party – most commonly the US or Russia, but also Africa as an ‘external’ region has received scholarly attention.¹⁹ The choice was mainly made to be able to assess the role (or lack thereof) as the EU as a security actor, and the relevance of EU–China relations in their own right rather than derivative from a US (or Russia) centred perspective. At the same time, we obviously recognize the independent role of key European states, in particular, the UK, Germany and France, as well as the internal EU decision-making procedures. We are also aware of the relevance of global, great power, politics as structuring EU–China relations. Experts were explicitly invited to comment on these aspects while keeping their focus on EU–China security relations.

For each of the dimensions, the experts were asked to identify threat perceptions as well as responses. In the first instance, assessments were made for the EU and China separately. Subsequently, an assessment was made of the degree of convergence or divergence regarding threat perceptions and responses between the EU and China. Any such convergence might apply both to the conceptual and normative understanding of the threat and policy response, but also to the actual content of policy responses. Experts based their assessment on key official statements of the Chinese government and EU institutions; in other words, the analysis is based on agreed policy rather than on the opinions of individual officials. Finally, the experts made an inventory of EU–China joint actions as evidence for cooperation at the bilateral as well as multilateral level.

¹⁹ E.g. see G. Bates, *The United States and the China–Europe relationship*, in *China–Europe Relations: Perceptions, Policies and Prospects* 270–286 (D. Shambaugh, E. Sandschneider & Z. Hong eds, Routledge 2008), S. Chu & S. Chen, *US–China–Europe Security Relations: Global Security Structure and Order in the Twenty-First Century*, in *China, Europe and International Security: Interests, Roles and Prospects* 91–106 (F.-P. van der Putten & S. Chu eds, Routledge 2011), L. Jacobson & J. Wood, *China’s Expanding Role in Africa and Implications for the EU*, in *Europe and China: Strategic Partners or Rivals?* 139–154 (R. Vogt ed., Hong Kong University Press 2012).

The study relies on specific criteria to measure convergence and cooperation as the key concepts in the analysis. Convergence is assessed by (1) the extent to which uniform positions exist within the EU and China on the perception of threat and relevant response, and (2) the extent of (dis)agreement on underlying principles such as sovereignty and (non)intervention. Rather than emphasizing constant opportunities and constraints, which would lead to a largely static assessment, scholars were asked to explore developments over time. This more dynamic approach aims to investigate whether any argument for convergence has either weakened or strengthened, and whether opportunities for cooperation have expanded, restricted or simply shifted. Cooperation is assessed on the basis of three principles: (1) progress from intentions, to agreements, to joint actions, (2) barriers to cooperation both internal, such as sovereignty, as well as external, e.g. the role of third parties such as the US, and (3) whether collaboration is in line with converging perception of threat and response. To summarize the rich information found in the various case studies, we proposed a simple categorization of convergence in threat perception and policy response into high, medium and low.

With regards to the way in which threats in a given issue domain are perceived on either side, the categorization is defined as follows:

- *High*: developments are regarded as a main or significant threat and associated with a high propensity to affect the peace and stability of the polity.
- *Medium*: developments are seen as a threat but not involving a high propensity to affect the peace and stability of the polity.
- *Low*: developments have received little, if any, attention as a threat.
- However even in areas where the EU and China share similar perceptions of threats, they do not necessarily respond with the same policies. It is also possible that the EU and China do not give a similar priority or salience to implementing any policy responses. In order to measure convergence, we follow the following definitions for the categorization of levels of convergence between China and the EU:
 - *High*: similar degrees of threat perception – as defined above – and high degree of overlap in relevant domestic response.
 - *Medium*: either variation in the degree to which they perceive the level of threat in a particular issue domain or in how their domestic policies respond to these threats.
 - *Low*: variation in the way they perceive the threat and in the extent or degree to which domestic actions have been introduced.
- The objective is moreover to provide an aggregate view on the level of cooperation. With a focus on joint actions at either the bilateral or multilateral level, we operationalize degrees of cooperation as follows:

- *High*: both partners actively and frequently encourage joint actions, including the involvement of personnel or resources; no or little evidence of any clear barriers to joint actions.
- *Medium*: infrequent joint actions but a common understanding and recognition that problems can be solved jointly, including evidence of willingness to commit personnel and resources; some evidence that barriers impede the regularity of joint actions.
- *Low*: joint action is absent or occasional; cooperation takes place predominantly at the level of discourse or intention rather than practice; constraining factors present clear barriers.
- Finally, an effort was made to identify key events that shaped the development of EU–China security relations in each of the ten dimensions.

4 FINDINGS

THREAT PERCEPTION of the EU and China is summarized in Table 3. The table gives the expert assessment for the ten security dimensions focused on the period 2010–2015. It shows that there is considerable consistency in the way the EU and China officially rate threats across the different domains.

Both sides consider the threat level of terrorism/organized crime, proliferation and regional threats as high. This does not necessarily imply that they agree on the specific content of the threat. Obviously, the different neighbourhoods of the EU and China lead to distinct threat perceptions in regional security. China is mainly occupied with East and South China Sea and the Korean peninsula, whereas Europe main concerns focus on its eastern (Ukraine, the Baltics and Russia) and southern borders (North Africa and the Middle East, in particular Syria). Yet there is some geographic overlap: both China and the EU are increasingly concerned about the instability emanating from the Central Asia region.²⁰ Even given agreement about the geographical focus of a threat, however, there does not have to be a similarity in the source of terrorist threats; the EU is mostly and increasingly concerned with Islamist radicals, while China main concern is with domestic terrorism. Bossong and Holmes observe that ‘Chinese attempts to associate domestic terrorists, mainly Uighurs, with global Islamist terrorism have not generally been recognized by Western countries.’²¹ With regards to (non)proliferation, the EU and China share a concern with the programs of North Korea and Iran.

²⁰ T. Diez, E. Scherwitz & S. Seng Tan, *Regional Solutions for Regional Conflicts?*, in Kirchner, Christiansen & Dorussen (eds), *supra* n. 18, at 42.

²¹ R. Bossong & L. Holmes, *Terrorism and Organized Crime: Common Concerns but Different Interests*, in Kirchner, Christiansen & Dorussen (eds), *supra* n. 18, at 81.

Table 3 Comparison of Levels of Threat Perception in the EU and China

<i>Security Dimension</i>	<i>EU Threat Perception</i>	<i>China Threat Perception</i>
Regional Security	High	High
Non-proliferation	High	High
Terrorism and organized crime	High	High
Climate change & energy security	High	High (energy)/Medium (climate)
Military security	High	Medium
Migration and immigration	High	Low
Civil protection	Medium	Medium
Cyber security	Medium	Medium
Economic security	Medium	Medium
Human security	Medium	Low

Source: Kirchner et al., *supra* n. 18, at 231.

Cyber security, civil protection and economic security are perceived to yield medium level threats by both sides. Here there is also considerable overlap in the perceived sources of the threat, namely the consequences of technological developments for economic and political stability. For the remaining dimensions – military security, human security, energy security and climate change – we observe more discrepancies in the official risk assessments. The EU is increasingly concerned that military posturing by Putin’s Russia reveals the limited European defence capabilities, while China is becoming more confident in its military strength. The various refugee crises have pushed immigration high on the EU agenda, while domestic migration and actual outward flow of Chinese migrants are only of limited concern for China. The EU perceives crises in governance and failed human security as a source of multiple threats (regional security, migration and terrorism). Chinese officials remain reluctant to subscribe to ‘Western’ notions of human security, while recognizing the consequences of state failure.

CONVERGENCE of domestic policy response between the EU and China is often limited. In some areas there is convergence in policy approach, for example, both the EU and China have financed large-scale investment

programs to stimulate growth and address any economic insecurities. In civil protection, China increasingly adopts a civilian-led and more devolved approach comparable with standard practices in the EU-area. At the same time, Chinese crisis management remains clearly more hierarchical with lack of ownership at the local level. For most areas, however, experts observe clear differences between Chinese and EU responses to security threats; most strikingly regarding cyber security.

The EU has a fundamentally different approach to cyber security to that of China, and also the United States and Russia, who follow a national security (threat) logic that favours deterrence and militarization, and thus hard cyber power. The EU focuses on soft cyber power – that is, building resilience to ensure rapid recovery from cyberattacks, building the necessary capacity to resist cyberattacks, and fighting cybercrime.²²

Low levels of convergence are also observed with respect to terrorism and energy security even though both the EU and China perceive threats as high. As possible reasons for the discrepancy, value considerations such as sovereignty and non-intervention, and identity formation were mentioned. Table 4 summarizes the levels of convergence on threat perception and policy response as well as the overall record of cooperation.

COOPERATION between the EU and China can be found across security domains. ‘Particularly noticeable is actual cooperation in key areas of traditional security, such as the joint antipiracy naval exercise off the coast of Somalia (the EU-led operation ATALANTA) and the nuclear negotiations with Iran, which were chaired by the EU’s High Representative.’²³ Cooperation, however, is never sufficient frequent nor barrier-free to warrant a ‘high’ classification; for example, in the area of nuclear non-proliferation there is a marked contrast between cooperation on the Iran file and the North Korean situation where China allows the EU to play only a limited role.

In civil protection, the EU and China have increased bilateral cooperation following the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. This benchmark event prompted the EU–China Disaster Risk Management Project in 2012. The EU and China also both engage in the proceedings of the UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the EU publicly expressed appreciation of the China’s humanitarian support in Haiti. There is also cooperation through the activities of the ARF (linking to

²² S. Bersick, G. Christou & S. Yi, *Cybersecurity and EU–China Relations*, in Kirchner, Christiansen & Dorussen (eds), *supra* n. 18, at 172.

²³ Kirchner et al., *supra* n. 18, at 234.

the regional security domain) and as part of increased Chinese involvement in peacekeeping (with obvious relevance for human security). In March 2015, the Chinese navy evacuated, among others, European citizens from Yemen, providing an interesting connection to military security.

Regarding economic cooperation, '[t]opics arising in the bilateral trade and investment relationship are discussed in a number of specific dialogs, of which the EU–China High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED) is especially important in terms of economic security'.²⁴ The G20 is also seen as the main forum to cooperate in responding to global economic challenges. China and the EU signed new agreement on customs cooperation in July 2014. Yet, these instances of active cooperation are somewhat marred by continued disagreement about China's market-economy status within the WTO.

In a number of security domains, cooperation is nearly exclusively at the level of discourse and joint statements with only occasional examples of practical cooperation. For example, EU–China cooperation on migration has seen some recent joint actions in the context of the dialogue on EU–China Mobility and Migration in 2013, and EU-sponsored seminars in China led by the International Organization of Migration. FRONTEx has also been part of training and sharing best practice with China in combating human trafficking. Neither terrorism nor organized crime has been high on the agenda of the annual EU–China Summits. In comparison with the other strategic partners of the EU, Renard²⁵ considers the level of cooperation on terrorism with China as the most limited. Nevertheless, Bossong and Holmes note that 'at technical levels, operational security cooperation is advancing',²⁶ for example, in joint customs operations which suggests a 'medium' level of joint action at least in the area of organized crime. In the area of cyber security, Bersick et al. conclude that '(d)ifferent logics and cyber cultures have so far inhibited meaningful bilateral and multilateral dialog and cooperation'.²⁷ At the same time, they observe that the European Commission has been more pragmatic in its approach to Chinese cyber espionage activity when compared to the United States.²⁸

²⁴ G. Geeraerts & W. Huang, *The Economic Security Dimension of the EU-China Relationship: Puzzles and Prospects*, in Kirchner, Christiansen & Dorussen (eds), *supra* n. 18, at 202.

²⁵ T. Renard, *Confidential Partnership? The EU, Its Strategic Partners and International Terrorism*, ESPO Working Paper 4 (Jan. 2014).

²⁶ Bossong & Holmes, *supra* n. 21, at 90.

²⁷ Bersick et al., *supra* n. 22, at 180.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, at 181.

Table 4 Comparison of Levels of Convergence and EU–China Cooperation

<i>Security Dimension</i>	<i>Convergence of Threat Perception and Policy Response</i>	<i>Cooperation, Joint Actions at Bilateral/Multilateral Level</i>
Non-proliferation	Medium	Medium
Civil protection	Medium	Medium
Economic security	Medium	Medium
Regional Security	Medium	Medium/Low
Climate change & energy security	Low/Medium	Medium
Military security	Low	Low/Medium
Human security	Low	Low/Medium
Terrorism and organized crime	Low	Low/Medium
Cyber security	Low	Low
Migration and immigration	Low	Low

Source: Adapted from Kirchner et al., *supra* n. 18, at 236.

For the security dimensions discussed so far, the degree of convergence of threat perception and policy response roughly matches the level of cooperation. This suggests that actual or perceived interests are indeed relevant for joint action. We observe discrepancies between convergence and cooperation on the remaining dimensions. On regional security, cooperation falls short of what may have been expected based on convergence. Regarding climate change, energy, military and human security, there are infrequent joint actions in spite of clear divergence of threat perception and policy response.

The EU's 2015 Strategic Review and the 2017 Strategy for Central Asia emphasize cooperation and the desire to explore linkages with the Chinese-led Silk Road initiative. Other instances of active engagement on regional security take place in the context of the ARF and the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM). Nevertheless, the EU and China present distinct and sometimes even competing models of regionalization. The very limited role of the EU in addressing increased Chinese maritime assertiveness in the East and South China accentuates that EU–Chinese cooperation in regional security is infrequent at best.

Some of the joint actions classified under civil protection or regional security could also serve as examples of joint actions under human security. However, the

Chinese government may not regard these actions as instances of human security since it retains a contrasting perspective on the content and norms of the latter (for example, regarding individual versus collective rights and sovereignty versus a Responsibility to Protect).

Counter-piracy has been the main area for military-to-military relations and joint actions. Duke and Wong²⁹ highlight the antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the quarterly Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings in Bahrain of the parties involved in counter piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean. There are also various on-going dialogues covering military security. At the same time, the ambitions of the EU to enhance transparency and cooperation, intensify military-to-military contacts and engage in high level security dialogue are not fully realized.³⁰ Beijing however argues that the on-going arms embargo (implemented following the repression of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989) is a hindrance to greater EU–China defence cooperation. Apart from its direct (but rather limited) effects, China views the arms embargo as relevant because ‘it has raised questions about the EU’s ability to maintain an independent position from the US and its ability to reach consensus among its members’.³¹ Bo, Biedenkopf and Chen argue that ‘(t)he EU and China have responded to climate security in different ways but with a converging trend’.³² This has resulted in joint actions at the bilateral level and increasingly the global level. Concrete joint actions have taken place in the field of ‘renewable energy, clean coal, biofuel and energy efficiency’.³³

5 CONCLUSIONS

Table 2 outlined four possible patterns for security cooperation emphasizing variation in joint actions over time and across issue domains. Considering the findings of our survey, we can note, first of all, that there are instances of joint action in nearly all security domains. At the same time, only in a small number of security domains is there any regularity with regard to joint action being undertaken. There is little evidence to suggest that cooperation is restricted to ‘low’ or non-traditional security; for example, the EU and Chinese joint action on the Iran file is a clear instance of cooperation on a ‘high’ security issue. The EU and China have also acted jointly on humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and joint customs

²⁹ S. Duke & R. Wong, *Chinese and EU Views of Military Security: Crafting Cooperation*, in Kirchner, Christiansen & Dorussen (eds), *supra* n. 18, at 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, at 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, at 33.

³² Y. Bo, K. Biedenkopf & Z. Chen, *Chinese and EU Climate and Energy Security Policy*, in Kirchner, Christiansen & Dorussen (eds), *supra* n. 18, at 114.

³³ *Ibid.*, at 115.

operations. Possibly even more telling is that such joint actions, even in non-traditional security domains, commonly involve military-to-military relations. EU and Chinese maritime vessels have cooperated in fighting piracy and (military) peacekeeping forces have worked together in peacekeeping missions in South Sudan and Mali.

Over the last decade, the EU and China have established an extensive network of dialogues. Since 2010 their strategic partnership includes foreign affairs, security matters and global challenges. Annual EU–China summits include discussions on security cooperation, and the 2012 summit encouraged regular dialogue on defence and security policy. In a number of security domains, such as cyber security, migration and human security, fundamental normative differences persist and generally impede joint action. At the same time, increased Chinese ambitions and capacity to act as a global power have not constrained EU–Chinese cooperation. The EU shares American concerns about Chinese territorial claims in the East and South China seas, and may even be more aware of rapidly expanding Chinese economic interest in Africa, but these concerns have so far not thwarted joint action.

Despite its long history of integration, the EU remains composed of states with distinct foreign and defence policies. The 2009 Lisbon treaty led to the appointment of a High Representative for foreign and security policy and the creation of the European External Action Service, thus creating a bureaucracy to match the ambitions of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Nevertheless a *common* policy does not imply a *single* policy, and individual Member States have maintained their own links with China. In practice, the ability (or even willingness) of China to pursue a ‘divide and rule’ approach appears rather limited, but there are increasing concerns about the initiatives such as the 16+1 format for cooperation between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe or the implementation of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. So far, however, individual Member States tend to promote an agreed EU stance in fora such as the UN Security Council where the EU’s own institutional position is weak. Alternatively, initiatives from individual Member States eventually become EU actions.³⁴ The potential impact of the UK decision to leave the EU on the actual or perceived relevance of the EU in security matters falls outside the time period covered by our study.

Inevitably, the US is the ‘elephant in the room’ in any bilateral China–EU relations given the strong security links between Europe and the US, most importantly via NATO as well as the American military presence in the Asia-Pacific. The Atlantic and Pacific are also rather loosely connected security regions

³⁴ H. Dorussen, L. Jin & E. Fanoulis, *Civil Protection: Identifying Opportunities for Collaboration*, in Kirchner, Christiansen & Dorussen (eds), *supra* n. 18, at 156–157.

(at least from a European perspective). This makes it feasible for the EU to engage with China across a range of different initiative even when the US raises concerns. An example is that most European states have become members of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank against the explicit preference of Washington. On the other hand, the EU has not seen it opportune to lift the arms embargo against China. As with Brexit, the election of the Trump presidency and its possible impact on EU–China relations falls outside the scope of our study. If anything it makes China and the EU look as more predictable negotiating partners.

Based on the findings presented here, two main conclusions can be drawn to explain the *pattern* of EU–Chinese cooperation. First, the alignment of interests in specific areas, for example the Iran nuclear deal, regional security in Central Asia, or customs cooperation to fight fraud and counterfeiting by organized crime is best explained in line with the expectations of Liberalism: opportunities for cooperation exist across a number of security domains, but issue-specific variation in constraints ultimately determines whether particular joint action occurs.

Second, practical experiences with joint action have encouraged further collaboration in a number of security domains: joint naval and peacekeeping operations have facilitated and diffused joint actions in military security, civil protection and, arguably, human security – in the case of the latter even without the presence of a shared understanding. Examples here are the evacuations of civilians from Libya and Yemen. Arguably, practical cooperation on renewable energy and energy efficiency between the EU and China has also contributed to the emergence of joint action on climate change and ultimately helped to create Chinese support for the 2016 Paris Agreement. This provides evidence that, in line with Institutionalist expectations, joint actions within specific domains may occur even when opportunities for cooperation appeared to be limited.