

BOOK REVIEW

The maritime turn in EU foreign and security policies, by Marianne Riddervold, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 240 pp., ₹14,999 (hardback) , ISBN: 978-3319665979

This study is an enquiry into the foreign and security policies of the European Union (EU) in the maritime domain. The focus of the book is to analyse as to why has there been a “maritime turn” in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of EU in recent years especially when member states of EU have disliked any interference with their sovereignty in this domain. In the light of several developments such as, the EU launching its first naval operation, Atalanta, off the coast of Somalia to counter piracy and also EU’s adoption of a Maritime Security Strategy, Marianne Riddervold begins by asking the central question “to what extent, how and why is the EU a maritime foreign and security actor in the making?” (3). In order to answer this, Riddervold examines three aspects of EU’s maritime policy; (i) the *aims* that help to characterise the shape of the policy, (ii) the *actors* who influence the outcome of the policy and (iii) the *mechanisms and drivers* of integration in this policy. Each of these aspects are dealt with in three separate sections of the book. And in this manner, the book is well organised and coherent.

The methodology used in researching these above mentioned three aspects, as set out in the introductory chapter, is also quite unique and interesting. It is a theoretically informed in-depth comparative analysis of EU maritime foreign and security policies across five different cases: The EU’s Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) and action plan; the EU’s naval missions, EUNAVFOR Somalia Atalanta (Atalanta) and EUNAVFOR Mediterranean Sophia (Sophia); EU policies towards the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) under the International Labour Organisation (ILO); and the EU’s Arctic policies. In addition to this, the study is extensive as it relies on a data collected from three sources – (i) insights from 48 interviews with official representatives of EU member states, officials from ILO, NATO, International Maritime Organisation (IMO), European Parliament, EU Council secretariat, EU Commission institutions, EU Operation Atalanta, etc. (ii) author’s own observations in attending EU coordination meetings in the International Labour Organisation (ILO), interactions with EU states in informal forums and during the final negotiations on the EUMSS and (iii) analysis of primary documents (like the, EU Conclusions, working documents, UK House of Lords’ reports, speeches, press releases, UN Security Council resolutions, etc.)

Part one of the book on “Aims” comprising of chapters 2, 3 and 4, examines the type of maritime policy that the EU has adopted and investigates whether EU is becoming a norm-based, humanitarian maritime actor or simply realist like other traditional great powers especially with respect to its naval operations.

Riddervold finds that EU has acted as a “humanitarian maritime actor” because it upheld the seafarers’ social and labour rights in promoting the Maritime Labour Convention even though it demanded higher costs of implementation that was to be borne by states (43–6), launched the operation Atalanta not to protect European shipping interests but to help the Somalis in providing them humanitarian aid, has respected international law in using force against the pirates (52–3) and launched operation “Sophia” as a search and rescue operation so as to save the lives of migrants at sea and prevent deaths (72). However, particularly in the case of Sophia, the author has cautioned that it is possible, in future, for the EU to start behaving as a traditional foreign policy actor shedding its humanitarian self-image if the refugee crisis begins to affect the core interests of member states (72). This note of caution, by

Riddervold, remains relevant especially in the light of recent events wherein Sophia has been heavily criticised by humanitarian organisations like the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) for withdrawing ships from search and rescue operations.¹ With respect to EU's policies towards the global commons as evident from its Maritime Security Strategy and its Arctic Policy and interviews with EU officials, the author again finds that EU wants to be seen as a humanitarian foreign policy actor despite having faced territorial aggression from Russia in Ukraine.

Next, part two of the book on "Actors", comprising of chapters 5 and 6, seeks to understand EU maritime foreign and security policy-making processes and investigates whether or not integration in this sector has moved beyond intergovernmental cooperation. The author shows that in the maritime sector, the integration of member states has occurred through the EU institutions. The author substantiates this by providing examples such as the EU Commission playing an influential role in exercising agency in the launching of the operation Atalanta, developing the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) as well as the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) policies. In fact, Riddervold shows how in the cases of EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) and the MLC, the Commission has gone beyond the control of member states and its formal powers under the CFSP. Apart from the EU Commission, the author identifies one more actor exercising control in the decision-making processes which is the EU External Action Service (EEAS) also known as the "EU foreign service", the administrative arm within the CFSP framework. Although formally, the EU Commission and the EEAS are to remain two separate administrative entities, Riddervold contends that they have informally started cooperating on maritime security issues, like on the EUMSS, and have even "institutionalized a new system on how to work together on a day-to-day basis" (135).

Finally, part three of the book on "Mechanisms and Drivers", comprising of chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10, examines the role of an external geopolitical factor: the annexation of Crimea by Russia in European neighbourhood that becomes crucial in the member states adopting the EUMSS and the EU Arctic policies. Apart from this, the Commission's role as a policy influencer is expanded again and finally, it is explained as to how EU's naval mission Atalanta was favoured over NATO's mission by the European countries in countering Somali-based piracy. In conclusion, Riddervold forwards the notion that EU has not only emerged as an important global maritime player but also possesses a particular "normative distinctiveness" in its maritime policies (161).

Written lucidly, the book is also intellectually stimulating. For instance, every chapter begins with taking several hypotheses each informed by different theoretical frameworks prevalent in the discipline of International Relations like the communicative action theory, neo-realist theories, rational-institutionalist approach, liberal intergovernmentalist approach, etc. The reader is curious to know as to which hypothesis is finally found to be true.

However, the book is not bereft of shortcomings. Generally, a pro-EU bias can be seen. The book would have been academically richer if it critically analysed EU's policy documents and its claims of being a humanitarian, norms promoting actor. For example, while analysing the case of Somali-based piracy, the author recognises that Spain had strong fishing interests in the region but still comes to the conclusion that EU's Atalanta is solely humanitarian in nature. Furthermore, Riddervold also claims that this particular characteristic of EU's maritime policy being humanitarian applies to all other EU foreign and security policies generally but she gives little reasons and illustrations to support the same.

Nevertheless, the book remains relevant given the fact that EU's naval missions: Atalanta and Sophia are still in operation. Whether or not EU will truly be a "humanitarian maritime power" with respect to these missions is something that remains to be seen. Nevertheless, this study recommends itself to scholars, policymakers, teachers and students having an interest in maritime affairs as well as in this organisation.

Note

1. Médecins Sans Frontières, “MSF Response to EU Decision to Suspend Operation Sophia Sea Patrols,” <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/msf-response-eu-decision-suspend-operation-sophia-sea-patrols> (accessed December 6, 2019).

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