

**MISSIONS AND CHALLENGES
OF THE EUROPEAN
BATTLEGROUPS**

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MISSIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE EUROPEAN BATTLEGROUPS

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ABSTRACT

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The European Union (EU) has developed a European Union Battlegroup (EU BG) designed to be a rapid response force dedicated for small-scale crisis management situations. The EU BGs are a 1500 man task force capable of short duration stand-alone operations that can be deployed on short notice (5-10 days) and are self-sustainable for 30 days. This paper will discuss the history and development, possible missions and expectations of the EU BG, and the operational and political challenges the EU BGs face as a European Rapid Reaction Force. The missions the EU BGs are currently designed for are: bridging operations, initial entry operations and stand-alone operations such as non-combatant evacuation and election security. These missions follow the guidance of the Petersberg Tasks, the European Security Strategy (ESS) and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). This paper will discuss how the EU will manage its forces with NATO and its interaction with the United Nations (UN). Finally, this paper will reflect on the future of the EU BGs and the potential credibility it gives the EU as a political entity with the ability to provide an element of "hard power."

MISSIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE EUROPEAN BATTLEGROUPS

The European Union (EU) has developed a European Union Battlegroup (EU BG) designed to be a rapid response force dedicated for small-scale crisis management situations. The EU BGs are a 1500 man task force capable of short duration stand-alone operations that can be deployed on short notice (5-10 days) and are self-sustainable for 30 days. This paper will discuss the history and development, possible missions and expectations of the EU BG, and the operational and political challenges the EU BGs face as a European Rapid Reaction Force. The missions the EU BGs are currently designed for are: bridging operations, initial entry operations and stand-alone operations such as non-combatant evacuation and election security. These missions follow the guidance of the Petersberg Tasks, the European Security Strategy (ESS) and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). This paper will discuss how the EU will manage its forces with NATO and its interaction with the United Nations (UN). Finally, this paper will reflect on the future of the EU BGs and the potential credibility it gives the EU as a political entity with the ability to provide an element of "hard power."

Background

The end of the Cold War changed the entire setting of the European social, political and military systems that existed after World War II. Communism was no longer the threat to Western Europe, and Eastern Europe was now free to establish democratic forms of government. The size and shape of the military in each of the European countries quickly became smaller along with their defense budgets. The focus throughout Europe was now to rebuild and unite Europe. Uniting European countries after a long Cold War seemed a daunting task. Previous to the Cold War, many of these

countries had strained and combative relations that would certainly prevent any type of unified effort for any type of task. The Cold War ended with calmed fears and strengthened relationships that eventually lead to the forming of a unified Europe. The Maastricht Treaty, a treaty that went into effect on 1 November 1993 formally established the European Union (EU). As of 1 January 2007 there are 27 countries with full membership to the EU.¹

The formalization of the EU called for a need to develop a security policy that would safeguard the common values and interests of the EU member states. The second pillar to the EU was the establishment of the Common Foreign & Security Policy (CFSP). The CFSP has five fundamental objectives: “1) to safeguard the common values, fundamental interests, independence and integrity of the Union in conformity with the principle of the United Nations Charter, 2) to strengthen the security of the Union in all ways, 3) to preserve peace and strengthen international security, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter, as well as the principle of the Helsinki Final Act and the objectives of the Paris Charter , including those on external borders, 4) to promote international co-operation, 5) to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”² The CFSP also identifies ways in which these objectives are to be pursued: “1) by defining the principles and general guidelines for the CFSP, which is done by the European Council, 2) deciding on common strategies. These instruments were introduced by the Amsterdam Treaty and set out overall policy guidelines for activities with individual countries. Each strategy specifies its objectives, its duration and the resources that will have to be provided by the EU and the Member States. 3) adopting

joint actions and common positions. These commit the Member States to adopting a certain course of action. They are decided by the General Affairs Council.”³ The CFSP authorizes the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), a document that covers the EU policy on defense and military actions related to the interests of the EU.⁴

The ESDP is a major element of the CFSP and is the EU successor to NATO’s European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI). The ESDP falls completely under the jurisdiction of the EU to include non-NATO countries under the EU. The ESDP allows the EU to conduct military and civil operations in Europe and around the world to protect the interests of the EU as an alternative to NATO and the United Nations for small-scale crisis management or state building.⁵ To this date, the EU has the ESDP, a European Security Strategy (ESS) and a collective military force dedicated to the EU known as the EU Battlegroups. The ESS, titled: “A Secure Europe in a Better World,” was approved by the European Council in Brussels, Belgium on 12 December 2003, drafted by Javier Solana the EU High Representative for CFSP.⁶ The conclusion of the document states “This is a world of new dangers, but also of new opportunities.” The ESS identifies five key threats that Europe must deal with: terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflict, failed states, and organized crime.⁷

Development of a European Union Battlegroup

The Franco-British Summit held in Saint-Malo, on 4 December 1998 produced a Joint Declaration on European Defense. The Heads of State and Government of France and the United Kingdom agreed: “The European Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crisis.”⁸ The

European Council Summit meeting held in Helsinki on 10-11 December 1999 concluded that special attention would be given to the development of a “rapid reaction capability.”⁹ This declaration began the initial steps to create a rapid response capability that the EU could use for small crisis management situations. The European Rapid Reaction Force (EURRF) developed initially, is now called the European Union Battlegroup (EU BG).

The EU BG is a military force with “the minimum military effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations, or for the initial phase of larger operations.”¹⁰ There are 15 battlegroups established consisting of multi-national contributions. The groups rotate on 6 month standby deployment cycles meaning that 2 groups are ready for deployment at all times. The battlegroups are under the direct control of the European Council of the European Union. The groups are designed for deploying on short notice (within 5-10 days) which could include land, sea, and air forces sustainable for 30 days with the possibility of an extension of up to 120 days if properly resupplied. Each EU BG is outfitted by the contributing countries in both personnel and equipment. The standard EU BG will normally include a headquarters company, three infantry companies, and corresponding support personnel. The type of specific units may include mechanized infantry, combat support units, and combat service support elements to include medical capabilities.¹¹

European Union Battlegroup Missions

To begin answering the question of what is possible and what is expected of the European Battlegroups, the different types of possible missions must be discussed. The types of missions for which the EU BG’s deploy will help determine the answers. The EU currently uses three tasks identified in Article 17(2) of the Treaty on European

Union, often referred to as the “Petersberg Tasks” and three tasks identified the European Security Strategy.¹² The Petersberg Tasks cover a great range of possible military missions, ranging from the simplest to the most robust military intervention. They are: 1) humanitarian and rescue tasks, 2) Peacekeeping tasks, 3) tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking.¹³ The ESS discusses a capable force that would be capable of taking on missions such as: 1) joint disarmament operations, 2) support for third countries in combating terrorism, and 3) security sector reform.¹⁴ These six missions listed by the Petersberg Tasks and the ESS, along with any other mission, would be approved by a United Nations (UN) mandate and also by NATO prior to execution by the EU BGs. The EU BG lends itself as an alternative to NATO or the UN for small scale crisis management.

Gustav Linstrom writes that there are other missions for the EU BG that augment and support the Petersberg Tasks and the ESS. These missions include: 1) bridging operations, 2) initial entry rapid response operations, and 3) stand-alone operations. These operations are not mutually exclusive; as they could overlap or have characteristics of each mission based on the scenario for which the force is employed. The execution of these scenarios by an EU BG would remain under the strategic direction and political control of the EU.¹⁵

The employment of an EU BG as a *bridging force* in support of troops already on the ground in support of an EU operation is a legitimate mission for a EU BG. An example would be to reinforce existing troops or take over a sector allowing other forces to regroup or reorganize. Operation Artemis, the deployment of European forces for a security and humanitarian crisis that erupted in the Ituri district of the Democratic

Republic of Congo (DRC) in early May 2003, is a successful example of a EU force conducting bridging force operations in support of a UN mission. *Initial entry rapid response operations* would be used to employ the EU BG as the initial force, that could conduct an expand the lodgment operation in support of a larger follow-on force. An example of this would be MINURCAT, a UN civilian police mission mandated to train and monitor national security forces, in which EUFOR was the enabler that provided a safe and secure environment for MINURCAT to be successful. *Stand-alone operations* would require a quick response with the ability to be self sustaining based on the location and role of the mission. An example of a Stand-alone operation would be the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) in South-East Asia. The AMM mission was established to monitor the implementation of various aspects of the peace agreement in Aceh (Indonesia). The AMM is completely impartial by nature and does not represent or favor any of the parties on either side of the dispute.¹⁶

European Battlegroup Challenges

The EU BGs face several challenges that have the ability to impair or prevent the successful outcome of a mission. This paper will discuss two categories of challenges. The first category is the practical operational challenges faced by all military forces. The second category is the political challenges that affect the strategic decision making process that enables the deployment of the EU BGs.

Operational Challenges

The operational challenges that will be discussed are: defense budget spending, standards, certification and training, decision-making process in planning, and strategic air and sealift. The operational challenges listed are each critical to the successful

deployment of a EU BG. These operational challenges all have a direct impact on rapid response to crises.

European countries individually all spend a varying amount on defense and all have different sized militaries to equip and train. Countries must cover individual EU BG costs such as transporting troops from participating countries to the area of operations as well as preparatory and standby costs during the 6 month on-call cycle.¹⁷ These upfront costs for countries providing troops and/or equipment can put a heavy drain on their defense budget or cause a country to reduce their amount of participation. Covering cost upfront is doable on operations with a long lead-time; however, for rapid reaction and short lead time deployments, a quick release of funds for some countries could be slow due to internal bureaucracies. To this date there have been no major budget problems that could not be resolved as the Member States all understand that expenditures are for the most part on a principle of “costs lie where they fall.”¹⁸ A common issue in EU Member States is that some countries may have a sizable defense budget; however, their defense spending is not necessarily focused on improving capabilities or equipment upgrades. Christopher S. Chivvis argues that European leaders should promote the development of common platforms especially “high density/low demand” platforms with dual civilian and military uses such as transport and communications. Chivvis understands that for national security each country would want to protect their defense industries; however, as noted on common platforms, money can be spent wiser and better for the common good of the EU BGs.¹⁹

The next operational issue is the standards, certification and training of EU BGs. Prior to an EU BG being put on a 6 month stand-by mission, an EU BG must meet

standards on a range of tasks and demands in order to be certified for stand-by status. The advantage of the certification process is that countries can rely on standards that are common to all participants and establish a baseline for expectations and requirements during a mission. The other advantage is that it establishes a book of standards, tasks and lessons learned that can be validated or improved upon by EU BGs returning from missions and deployments.²⁰

The issues remaining in the current certification process deal with the command, control and communications aspect of operations. This example ties back to defense budgets and spending for common platforms that improve multilateral dialogue between countries. The other issues involve the certification on small amounts of commitments from several countries, the certification of four or five small elements can be difficult, unless the entire battlegroup is together on a combined training exercise. Training is a national responsibility and member states are expected to provide the EU with well trained personnel. Conducting a combined training exercise of all elements from several countries in one location is costly and difficult. Thus certification standards could be waived or too difficult to evaluate because of the lack of combined training.²¹

The next operational challenge is the EU decision-making process. The current process per the European Union Treaty states that all member states must decide on an EU BG deployment by consensus. The Treaty also allows member states to abstain “constructively” permitting the other members to launch an operation without their support. To date, all ESDP operations have had full consensus from the member states. The first issue to the decision-making process challenge is the time that is taken by the Council of Ministers or the General Affairs Council in making a decision for

authorization to deploy an EU BG. The Council of Ministers currently meets once per week, and the General Affairs Council meets monthly. There are procedures for emergency meetings during a time of crisis, however, much time is lost for the individual member states and the militaries to conduct and refine planning for deployment and initial early operational coordination.²² Some of the planning involves Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs), Status of Mission Agreements (SOMAs), and the increased sharing of information and intelligence.

Since no country involved in an EU BG would want to be the reason their domestic decision-making policy impairs the deployment of an EU BG, the issue can be overcome with work-arounds. Other ways of reducing planning time and speeding the decision-making process is through co-operation, sharing, enabling, and exchange of liaison officers. This proved very effective for EUFOR Chad-MINURCAT deployment of EU forces.²³ These issues based on Peter V. Jakobsen's article are similar to challenges in Civilian Crisis Management Capacity (CCMC) with EU civilian elements deploying in support of UN missions.

The next operational challenge for the EU BGs is strategic airlift. This challenge directly relates to defense budgets and best use of defense spending. The cost of airplanes capable of strategic airlift is very high and some EU countries cannot afford to purchase the quantity they require, and pay for the up-keep and maintenance costs associated with aircraft. As of February 2007 there were 591 airplanes in the EU air forces with cargo capabilities. There are 4 C-17s in the EU inventory with 3 more being purchased by fifteen NATO members to include Sweden, with final delivery in 2009. The purpose of these 7 C-17s is to provide rapid response airlift for NATO, the EU and

the UN. This pooling of resources is consistent with the ESS statement of sharing of common use transportation assets.²⁴

The strategic airlift requirements for Operation Artemis required 50 sorties of the Antonov An-24, 20 sorties of the Airbus 300 and 72 sorties of the C-130 to airlift 1500 troops and equipment to Entebbe, Uganda. Once on the ground an additional 276 sorties of C-130 airlift was required for intra-theater lift. For the entire Artemis Operation, 2410 metric tons were transported by airlift.²⁵ This EU operation confirms the need for strategic airlift and the importance it plays in the deployment, sustainment, and re-deployment phase of operations.

The purchase of 7 C-17 airplanes by far does not solve the EU BG strategic airlift problem. Based on possible mission locations in Africa, a C-17 airplane may not have the ability to land due to the airfield being too small or inadequate. Airlift requirements capable of landing on dirt strips or makeshift runways will always be needed. Airlift capable of extended range 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) or greater, are the most appealing to the requirements of supporting the EU BGs.

Airbus is now producing the A400M cargo lift airplane. The A400M is a four-engine turboprop military transport and tanker, designed and built by the European corporation Airbus Military. It has been ordered by 10 countries and will replace a variety of aircraft, including the Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules and the Transall C-160. The A400M range is 3300 Kilometer (1782 miles) and has a payload of 82,000 lbs. The A400M is priced at approximately \$140 million, a price more affordable to European countries.²⁶ There are currently 196 orders for the A400 with the last deliveries in 2018 at a rate of 30 deliveries per year.²⁷ A portion of a long-term solution to EU BG strategic

lift is on order, coupled with current airlift capabilities the EU BGs can deploy, but at a slower rate than desired.

Another option that the EU is exercising is the use of leased Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS) which consists of 6 Antonov An-124s that are permanently available to the EU, NATO, or for national deployments. The SALIS contract runs for three years (at a leasing rate of about \$220M). The lease can be extended until 2012 and some are predicting that the arrangement might turn into a permanent solution beyond 2012.²⁸ Since airlift is heavily reliant on money from defense budgets, the EU countries are working together on pooling resources that will ensure mission success.

The last operational challenge discussed in this paper is the EU BGs strategic sealift capabilities of the EU. Based on the NATO exercise Steadfast Jaguar 06 in the Cape Verde Islands, the sealift requirements for a EU BG is estimated to be approximately 17,000 m² of deck space and 150 sea containers on 2 Roll-on Roll-off (Ro/Ro) ships.²⁹ Providing these vessels is not a problem for the Member States and their navies. The issue is the readiness of the ships and their crews, i.e. the time it takes to prepare and load the ships, steam to the area and unload the troops and material. Ro/Ro vessels can be expected to travel at an average of 20 knots and tankers at 12 knots speed. For such a task force a sealift of 4000 kilometers (2100 nautical miles) would then take seven to eight days. Currently the EU has 67 sealift vessels available to the EU for strategic sealift.³⁰ These facts provide the EU with a challenge that sealift is key for sustainment and follow-on force deployment but may be questionable for rapid deployment. The ability to deploy within the 10 day requirement by sealift could be impossible depending on the distance of the deployment and the readiness of the ships.

The EU must consider the possibility of pre-positioning equipment in strategic locations of potential deployment areas. The possibilities of putting equipment on the ground or on vessels at sea, give the EU planners the ability to reduce deployment timelines. The option of pre-positioning again impacts on the defense budgets and national sealift assets. The other impact is on training without the equipment, and if the EU BG is a multi-national force, getting the equipment consolidated and loaded on one vessel or multiple vessels adds to the challenges. The other possibility the EU and NATO are exploring, is an 11-nation consortium lead by Norway, that would provide assured access to 12-14 commercial sealift ships that could be used for EU BG deployments or deployment support.

These operational challenges all have work-around solutions, as that has been proven through deployments and exercises. As stated in each of these challenges, they all are tied to defense budgets and defense spending. There is not necessarily a requirement for each of the EU countries to spend more on defense; however, defense spending can be improved by spending on common platforms, such as transportation and communications. The EU countries have all made sacrifices and improvements in their defense budgets in order to improve their own military forces and the EU BGs. Wise spending by each country will benefit the EU BGs capabilities, equipment, training, and deployment capability.

Political Challenges

The next category of challenges the EU BGs must deal with are the political challenges. The political challenges that will be discussed are: UN/NATO decision-making process, the EU BG relationship to the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the

employability of the EU BG. These political challenges all have an impact on the EU BGs roles, missions, and their ability to be considered a credible force of the EU.

The first political challenge is the time in which it can take the UN to approve a mandate, as well as, NATO approving the use of force. The EU sees the EU BGs as an alternative to NATO and to the UN for small scale crisis management or state building.³¹ Situations that require a rapid response still require a UN mandate. The feasibility of the UN approving a mandate in a timely manner may give the situation time enough to escalate into something requiring a force larger than the EU BG. An example of this is when the Europeans failed to get involved early in the Balkans conflict and the Rwanda genocide in the 1990s. The latest example, in October 2008, the UN asked for additional forces to aid in the ongoing UN mission MONUC in the DRC. The call to the EU has gone unanswered as the crisis continues. The EU BG could provide short-term cover until additional forces arrive from other non-EU and non-NATO countries; to date the EU has removed this option from the table.³² These examples of the failure to react early, will hang over the EU in a negative way. The EU must be able to deal with crisis management early in order to have diplomatic credibility.³³

The situation described presents a politically difficult situation. Would the EU consider deploying the EU BG with an invitation from the host country and the UN Secretary General? The issue of a UN mandate is sensitive and the EU must clearly define if they want to pursue operations without a UN mandate. The EU must decide that if there is a situation that has a direct impact on the interests of the EU, and the UN has not passed a mandate, should the EU intervene? The trigger points for decisions to employ the EU BG without a UN mandate must be in place.

The next political challenge is the relationship of the EU BG to the NRF. Twenty-one of twenty-seven EU member states are also members of NATO. There are six EU member states not participating in NATO, however, four of these states do participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP). Malta and Cyprus do not have a formal link to NATO.³⁴ The debate begins with the discussion of the similarities and differences between the EU BG and the NRF.

The similarities are the types of missions they are designed to be employed, the ability to rapidly deploy, the ability to sustain itself for 30 days, and both forces are on 6 month rotations. The other similarities of both forces are that for the most part, they come from the same pool of forces and require the same resources for deployment.³⁵

The EU BG and the NRF give contributing countries challenges of available forces. Both Linstrom and Mika Kerttunen state that dual-hatting military forces to the NRF and the EU BG can increase risk by stretching military resources very thin.³⁶ Kerttunen states "NATO does not want to take a risk that member states would withdraw their troops from the NRF due to other arrangements. The EU on the other hand does not want to freeze troops to any particular organization. NATO's viewpoint is based mostly on military effectiveness and predictability."³⁷

The last political challenge the EU BG faces the employability of the force. To date, a true EU BG has not been deployed. Operation Artemis was similar to an EU BG deployment and many lessons were learned from the deployment. These lessons were incorporated into the training and certifications of EU BGs. In July 2006, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) required UN mission assistance prior, during and after national elections. The requirement was for approximately 1500 troops, the situation in

the DRC had the potential to be volatile, and Germany had one EU BG on standby.³⁸

This stood to be an ideal Initial Operating Capability (IOC) test for the EU BG in a mission it was partially designed to perform. The EU BG did not deploy because political leaders felt a rapid response was not needed as this mission was known in advance, and because the mission would last longer than 120 days.³⁹

As time continues and now that the EU BGs have reached Full Operational Capability (FOC) as of January 2007, the political pressure to use the EU BGs grows.⁴⁰ Criticism already exists on the cost of maintaining two stand-by pools of forces. The EU BGs and NRF receive their forces from the same sources; and during times of economic difficulty, pressure to have forces committed to two stand-by requirements may cause a need for justification. Politics could drive the need to use an EU BG for a low risk scenario such as a non-combatant evacuation or an election oversight and security mission. These missions are very possible in Africa and even in the Balkans, as they could be short in duration and ideal for the EU BG. The more successful the first missions are, the easier it may be for each country to invest in the resources for the EU BG.⁴¹

Conclusion

The EU has dedicated itself to being able to provide “hard security” to round out its already powerful economic influence it has on the world. The EU has developed a modest military force known as the European Battlegroups (EU BG) that have the capability to rapidly deploy to an area of small-scale crisis. This paper has discussed what the EU BG possible uses and capabilities are, as well as, the challenges it faces in the future.

The many possible uses include those tasks identified in the Petersberg Tasks and the European Union Security Strategy (ESS). The most probable of those tasks are bridging operations, initial entry operations and stand-alone operations, such as non-combatant evacuation and election security. Since the EU BGs are small in size (1500 soldiers) the prospect of the EU BG being a major military offensive power is not a viable option for the present. The EU BG is a small step for the EU in providing a bigger and more credible role in security where EU interests are involved. The EU is determined to improve its military capabilities in order to provide a credible force for small scale crisis management. The EU BG is capable of performing most of those types of missions.

The many challenges the EU BG faces raises questions about their capabilities and expectations. The European defense budgets will determine whether most of these challenges can be overcome. Strategic air and sealift are key and essential to the rapid deployment of the EU BGs. The next decade of airlift purchases, in particular the Airbus A400M, will improve the mobility of the battlegroups and provide a reliable multi-use airplane for several years to come.

The political challenges of responsive decision-making and the EU BGs relationship to the NATO Response Force (NRF) are difficult challenges that will take diligent work by each contributing country in order to overcome obstacles. Will the EU deploy their battlegroups without a UN mandate or an invitation from a host country or the UN Secretary General? The current DRC crisis has a UN mandate (UN Resolution 1843, 20 November 2008)⁴² and the EU has chosen not to deploy their EU BG. This is an opportunity, with a mandate, to deploy the EU BG in a scenario for which it was

designed. A purpose of the EU BG is to react quickly to a small scale crisis before it is too large, thus preventing the deployment of a larger force, such as the NRF. If the EU BG is not used within the next year or two, will political pressure question its purpose or existence?

The EU currently is a major economic influence on world events, however, their EU BG is a small force structured for minor duties for a short timeframe. The message being sent is that the “EU BG is the minimum military effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations for the initial phase of larger operations.”⁴³ Deployment of the EU BG would be ideally suited for small lower risk missions, until the EU achieves a better balance in the ways and means to which the objectives will be met. The EU concept of solving a small crisis before it gets bigger and more complex can be achieved through the deployment of the EU BG if all approvals are given in a timely manner.

Endnotes

¹ European Union, “The Maastricht Treaty,” http://europa.eu/scadplus/treaties/maastricht_en.htm, (accessed 27 December 2008).

² Common Foreign & Security Policy, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/cfsp/intro/index.htm (accessed 27 December 2008).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ European Security and Defense Policy, http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/european_security_defence_policy_en.htm, (accessed 27 December 2008).

⁶ Ibid.

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