Establishing a European Security Community: Milestones and Strategic Implications

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In December 2017, about 60 years after the signing of the Rome Convention, which constitutes the cornerstone of the European Union, defense ministers of 25 EU countries signed a "Permanent Structured Cooperation" agreement (PESCO).[1] The purpose of the agreement is to enhance the security cooperation between the member countries and increase investment in defense capabilities that will be available for EU joint military operations. The difference between PESCO and previous cooperation frameworks on security issues is that the agreement is expected to comprise a basis for a "European security union" – an organization that would promote integration between military units and develop joint projects between European member states.[2] The agreement was signed after decades of creating pan-European institutions, including a judicial system, parliament, currency, and foreign policy, accompanied by resolute opposition to military integration, which the EU countries perceived as an impediment to their sovereignty.[3]

The decision to establish PESCO was taken in view of a series of security challenges that prompted Europe's leaders to reassess the idea of military integration: the political chaos in the Middle East and the ensuing immigration challenge; Russia's aggressive activity, manifested in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the cognitive campaigns to cultivate rifts and polarize the European community; and the election of Donald Trump as US President, after he expressed doubts as to the US commitment to European security. These were joined by the decision of

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the UK – the main opponent to the move – to leave the EU, which removed the last obstacle to the EU organizing a security entity.[4]

The article presents PESCO's institutional and economic infrastructure and its strategic goals as a solution to the continent's security challenges. The article also discusses the strategic implications of the joint organization for the EU's ties with NATO and Russia. Finally, it focuses on the possible value of cooperation between Israel and PESCO.

The History of European Security Policy

The desire to develop a European security community has existed for decades, but the idea met stiff political opposition that kept it off the EU agenda. Right after World War II, the Soviet threat and the apprehension that Germany would rearm led to a proposal to establish a European Defence Committee (EDC) that would comprise West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, and Luxembourg and be under a joint European military and political leadership. The EDC treaty was signed in 1952, but the initiative collapsed after the French parliament refused to ratify it.[5]

In the 1970s, when the EU became an economic power, there were growing expectations that the EU would renew the efforts to build a common framework regarding foreign and security issues. Thus in 1970 a document entitled European Political Cooperation (EPC) was presented in order to promote coordination in foreign policy between EU members, but the document did not result in many achievements.[6] Later, following the Single European Act (SEA) signed in 1986 as part of the integration and extension of the European Community, a permanent secretariat was established to present an agenda for European foreign policy, without engaging in security matters.[7]

The Yugoslavian civil war atrocities in the 1990s spurred Europe's leaders to concede the need for institutionalizing European cooperation on security issues. The Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992 made it clear that the security dimension is an integral part of the European integration process; consequently, the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) framework was established. The Helsinki summit in 1999 ratified the commitment to a common security policy and led to the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) agreement. The security integration of the EU was extended following the September 11 terrorist attacks, when the European Defense Agency (EDA) was established, entrusted with developing crisis management

capabilities, promoting cooperation on armament issues, and improving security technology research.

The Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007, presented new apparatuses for implementing EU security and defense policy, chiefly the Common Security and Defense Policy agreement (CDSP) of the EU, which superseded the ESDP agreement.[8] In addition, the Treaty of Lisbon presented a framework called Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), designed to foster cooperation between EU member states under the supervision and funding of the EU. Although the European Parliament urged the countries to implement the treaty's articles, France was the only country to do so, following the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015. However, France decided to implement article 42(7) calling for mutual reciprocal aid only, and not to implement article 222 calling for operational solidarity, so that the measure had chiefly political, rather than practical, significance.[9] Therefore, until 2015, a European military infrastructure remained in the realm of a theoretical idea.

The Security Challenges Facing the European Community

From the vantage of the EU, one could describe the year 2016 as "the year of atrocities." The security challenges that arose that year exposed the defects in the defense doctrine of the European countries and the need for establishing a supra-national security organization.[10]

From the intra-continental point of view, Europe had to cope with numerous challenges: the influx of refugees that engulfed the continent and the vain attempts to find an agreed formula for their relocation triggered disputes between EU members;[11] terrorist attacks in Brussels, Nice, and Berlin exposed the unpreparedness of the internal security forces for the Islamic fundamentalist threat;[12] and above all, the national referendum in the UK was decided in favor of quitting the EU.[13] Over and beyond the loss of a major actor in the European defense disposition, Britain's exit gave rise to the apprehension that other countries might follow suit.[14]

In parallel to the domestic challenges, the international arena was likewise unsettled. Due to the Arab Spring events that began in late 2010, Middle East states became hubs of instability, a source of mass emigration, and fertile ground for nurturing fundamentalist organizations.[15] Russia under Putin's leadership adopted a revisionist policy, aspiring to broaden its borders of influence. This policy was manifested in the military incursion into Georgia (2008), annexation of the Crimean Peninsula (2014), and the military campaign in Ukraine. Subsequently covert intervention by

Russia in election campaigns in European states also came to light; this intervention was aimed at widening the rifts between communities and strengthening the electoral power of extremist movements supportive of the Putin regime and averse to the EU.[16]

The most critical challenge for the EU was perhaps the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in November 2016. During his campaign, Trump attacked the failure of several NATO states to comply with the NATO instructions to allocate 2 percent of the GDP for security needs, and questioned the US commitment to implement article 5 of the NATO convention (obligating all NATO member states to come to the aid of an attacked country).[17] After entering office, he retained this posture.[18] Such statements, coupled with his positive statements about Putin, caused apprehension as to US unwillingness to come to the aid of European countries should they be subject to Russian aggression.[19]

The internal European challenges coupled with the changes in the international arena led Europe's leaders to switch from the traditional defense doctrine, based on national armies and NATO, to the concept that these challenges necessitate structured cooperation in order to bolster EU defense capabilities as an integrated unit. Consequently, during 2016-2017, Germany and France promoted a joint proposal advocating pan-European defensive cooperation, with the support of the majority of EU member states and institutions.[20] The only country opposing the proposal was the UK, apprehensive that the European army might undermine NATO. The UK's decision to leave the EU, however, opened a historic window of opportunity to establish a "Common European Army."[21] Accordingly, on November 13, 2017, 23 countries signed a declaration of their intention to implement the PESCO plan, and on December 11 the decision was ratified by the European Council.[22]

The Infrastructure for the Common European Defense Program

The drive to establish an integrative military body appears in article 42(6) in the Treaty of Lisbon, calling on EU countries to step up their mutual commitment regarding defense issues and invest efforts in establishing a permanent, structured operational force, known as PESCO.[23]

As a security union PESCO would only include countries willing to commit themselves to "demanding security missions" and increase their defense budgets steadily. Although the purpose of the article was to weed out certain states and streamline the decision making mechanism, almost

all EU countries accepted the conditions.[24] The participant countries signed twenty commitments, which include increasing their defense budgets, investing in R&D, training human resources, and alleviating regulations in order to facilitate military mobility.[25] EU institutions are also involved in the program: the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security and Vice President of the European Commission will be responsible for supervising the annual assessment of PESCO; the Military Committee of the EU will discuss the support for the operational aspects of the program;[26] and the European Defense Fund will provide $6.4 billion in annual funding.[27]

The program will be conducted on two levels: the first, at the level of the European Council, responsible for overall policy and the decision making process, including overseeing the countries' compliance with their commitments; at the second level, the executive level, the participant countries will manage the projects relevant to them according to general guidelines.[28] The first stage of the program will continue until 2021, during which time the Multiannual Financial Framework will be established and the countries will start to fulfill their commitments. In the second stage, which will continue until 2025, the countries will have to meet their set objectives, after which the objectives will assessed and the next stages defined.[29] Other countries may be invited to join the projects, though their acceptance will be conditional on their participation endowing significant added value; they would not be awarded powers of decision.[30]

In the first stage, the member states will focus on promoting 17 projects, including establishing a staff and logistics center, establishing a pan-European medical unit, and building a rapid response force to intervene rapidly in crises and natural disasters.[31] The immigration crisis now plaguing Europe has made the Maritime Surveillance Project one of the leading projects in the program. This is an important step toward strengthening the control of common external borders.[32] In response to terrorist threats, response teams will be established for emergency medical responses and a military force set up for rapid deployment. Regulations will also be adjusted in order to facilitate military traffic movement on European borders. Several projects will be established in the cyber realm, in response to Russian influence operations. Greece and Lithuania will operate teams for analysis and response to cyber events, and internet defense measures will be developed to enhance the immunity to attacks and reduce their frequency. The sides will cooperate and share their capabilities and intelligence with EU institutions and participant countries.[33]

Strategic Implications of the Military Cooperation

At first glance, the PESCO program appears to constitute an essential change in view of the strategic threats European countries have faced in recent years. The EU can utilize the program for improving the cooperation between its members, enhancing its technological prowess, and reinforcing its maritime borders to prevent uncontrolled immigration. On the other hand, however, establishing a pan-European defense framework portends considerable difficulties, including disputes between member states, coordination difficulties vis-à-vis NATO, and the tension with Russia.

First, it is possible that the program will not foster cooperation between EU member states, but could give rise to disputes between its member states. For example, PESCO architects Germany and France might have different objectives: Germany perceives PESCO as a means for European integration, and therefore, is interested in maximizing the number of member countries. France, on the other hand, is interested in a high acceptance criterion (two percent of the GDP invested in security, and 20 percent of the defense expenditure channeled to technological procurement and development), in order to streamline management of the framework. At present, neither of the two has had to compromise, since almost all the EU countries joined agreeing to the threshold conditions set by France. However, should any country not be able to comply with the required threshold level, tension might develop between the countries.[34] Second, despite the willingness of the countries signatory to PESCO to participate in conducting ambitious security projects, they could delay the program's development due to sluggish bureaucracy, political opposition at home, and budgetary constraints.[35]

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Of no less importance are the relations with NATO. Even if the pan-European military project starts to take shape, the reliance on the US military might necessitate retaining cooperation with NATO. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg gave his blessing to the European initiative and stressed the need for coordination between PESCO and NATO.[36] At the same time he cautioned of the possibility of redundancies and overlap, since 22 out of the 25 states participating in the program are also NATO member states.[37] Despite NATO's approval of the program, the possibility that Europe would establish a parallel military

force for itself raises several questions: how will cooperation between the two entities be conducted? Would there be redundancy in future projects, and in particular, will this program be economically viable? Most of the countries would probably not be able to afford the cost of investing in a new security entity, and it is feared that the security investment designated for PESCO projects might come at the expense of investing in NATO.

Regarding the cognitive threat posed by Russia, the tension between the EU and Russia can be expected to grow. In October 2017, the European Commission declared that the EU countries have formulated a document indicating that cybernetic attacks on the part of hostile actors could constitute a casus belli, and in extreme circumstances, justify the use of conventional weapons.[38] In view of the fact that most Russian offensive activity has been conducted in the cyber realm, the change in doctrine could stimulate a drop in Russian activity. Moreover, a significant number of the projects to be promoted in PESCO focus on cyber defense. However, the ability of the European military union to deter Russia from continuing to pursue its offensive activity is tenuous, since Russia is a nuclear power, and France, the only member state with nuclear weaponry, has yet to indicate its willingness to share its nuclear capabilities with PESCO.

Finally, the question arises, how will the PESCO program relate to tertiary states interested in joining the program? The complexity and scale of the security challenges to Europe could necessitate including other countries, especially those with distinct military capabilities. Despite Brexit, Britain wishes to remain an important actor in the European arena and might join PESCO should the tension with Russia increase.

The Relations between Israel and the EU in the PESCO Era

When the conditions under which other countries may join PESCO projects become clear, Israel will have to weigh the advisability of positioning itself as a potential candidate for joining the program, or of developing cooperative ties with the program. Israel shares many interests with the PESCO program. For example, one of its flagship projects is to establish a medical unit that would support military operations and crisis situations. Israel's experience in providing emergency aid in crises could contribute considerably to this unit.[39] The project for establishing a rapid response force to intervene in crises could be considerably bolstered if the know-how Israel has accumulated in the cyber security field were shared with PESCO, as would cooperation with the Israeli cyber system.[40] These realms

are at the top of PESCO's priorities; therefore, Israel could be perceived as a potential candidate. Joining the program could present Israel with an opportunity to bolster its standing in Europe, and this could be manifested both in defense ties and on the political level.

Israel, however, must consider the political and strategic implications of cooperation or membership in PESCO with caution. From a strategic point of view, the emphases in the program on contending with maritime migration, terrorist threats in Europe, and Russian aggression do not coincide with Israel's security threats; therefore, Israel would gain little security benefit from joining. Moreover, though PESCO has NATO's support at present, the possibility of future tension that could stimulate deterioration in the system of trans-Atlantic relations cannot be discounted. In this situation, explicit identification of Israel with PESCO could trigger tension with United States. In addition, identifying Israel with PESCO could cast a shadow on its ties with Russia. Thus this step could have significant diplomatic ramifications, especially in view of Russia's involvement in the long drawn out conflict in Syria.

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At the same time, based on data from recent years, Europe has become a significant destination for Israeli security exports.[41] Most of these exports have provided a response to security needs such as immigration, counter terrorism, and cyber defense, which are top priority issues for PESCO.[42] Israel could gain considerably if it succeeds in extending these trade ties, without highlighting its identifying with the program in a way that could impair its ties with its other allies.

Conclusion

At present, the chances that a "common European Army" might be established are tenuous and its potential effectiveness is questionable, especially given that the main challenge facing the European Union is the growing tension with Russia, whose activity to influence elections in the West continues unabated. Other difficulties are anticipated in the integration processes between the various reservist units, in the countries' ability to comply with the budgetary commitments, and in preserving the trans-Atlantic ties.

On the other side of the coin, the PESCO program could be a means both for increasing military cooperation, as well as for constituting a basis for a new army of the EU.[43] Over and beyond the defensive implications of building a pan-European army for the security of EU countries, the political significance of this step is reinforcement of the ability of the European community to counter the forces bent on its disintegration.

Notes

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