

‘Creating the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) Framework’

GYLF Closed Session Preparation Paper

Thursday 6 June 2019

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The global security environment is changing rapidly and in ways that challenge democracies, global governance systems, and the global security architecture. There are number of challenges that threaten the rules-based order and influence the discussion around multilateral responses, such as whether the European Defence Integration is the best mechanism to mitigate and respond to these challenges.

Global challenges

The rules-based order supports the peaceful resolution of disputes, facilitates free and open trade and enables access to the global commons to support economic development. Some global trends are challenging this order and are detailed below: major power competition, domestic and border security and ‘grey zone’ challenges.

Competition between major powers trying to promote their interests outside of the established rules impact free and open trade and can lead to uncertainty and tension. This can raise the risk of miscalculations and military confrontation. For example, Russia’s refusal to act in ways consistent with international law, like in Ukraine, and the relationship between the United States and China, which is characterised by a mix of cooperation and competition. Trends that are challenging many nation’s domestic security, prosperity and border security include: terrorism, mass migration, transnational crime, and emerging technology.

Perhaps the most serious of threats include the changing nature of warfare and the increase of the use of tactics below the threshold of war such as actions conducted in the ‘grey zone’. In particular, globally networked information systems make it easier for states and non-state actors to compromise national sovereignty and security, in addition to targeting individuals and businesses. For example, the activities of Russian cyber actors during the 2016 US presidential election.

Threats in the ‘grey zone’ can also look like the information campaigns, predatory economic coercion, intellectual property theft and attacks on critical national infrastructure such as power grids. These actions can be hard to attribute to an actor or state and so they can be difficult respond to. Democracies in particular, find it difficult to respond to these tactics as they are often caught between protecting their interests and upholding their values.

Risks and opportunities

There is increasing pressure on the EU to independently ensure its own security against these emerging and new threats. Recent changes in the existing order, such as the Trump Presidency and Brexit, cast doubts on the strength of existing security architecture like NATO and the capacity of



Europe, as it is today, to defend itself. This only further emphasises the point that in the EU, the security interests of each member state are inextricably linked. To face these challenges, it is important to work together.

The European Commission has established a European Defence Fund and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) on security and defence. PESCO is a treaty-based framework designed to deepen defence cooperation amongst those EU Member States who are capable and willing to do so. The aim is to enhance the EU's capacity as an international security actor, contribute to the protection of EU citizens and maximise the effectiveness of defence spending in complementarity with NATO. The difference between PESCO and other forms of cooperation is the legally binding nature of the commitments from participating Member States.

There are a number of possible benefits resulting from closer EU defence integration. It can enhance security for European citizens by preserving EU borders. Indeed, porous borders and mass migration is an increasing risk for European security, particularly with increased number of terrorist activities. PESCO could also create more efficient military spending to align and supplement military capabilities and minimise capability gaps. Greater EU defence integration can complement and strengthen NATO by standardising equipment and interoperability between EU members. This would make EU a more effective contributor to NATO's objectives and strengthen the transatlantic relationship.

However, there are a number of risks in increasing EU defence integration. It could duplicate NATO structure and draw away EU resources from contributing to NATO operations and missions. There is also a lack of trust between Central Europe and the rest of Europe, particularly since increased military agreements are seen as France and Germany-centric. The expected level of integration could be considered a risk as critics argue that it will lead to the establishment of a joint EU military force. In this scenario, integrating Defence forces is not the biggest challenge - as this has already been achieved in coalitions in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Rather, the bureaucracies will be difficult to integrate due to their complex, and sometimes, vastly different structures.

While defence integration might be useful for border protection, it is increasingly hard to respond to threats in the 'grey zone'. It is still unclear whether increased EU Defence integration is going to be the right mechanism to respond to threats from emerging technologies and tactics in the grey zone like information campaigns and cyber-attacks.

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