

A European Union Army: Objective or Chimera?



Summary:

The European Union has again become preoccupied with the idea of building an army of its own. That is a very significant shift in attitude. Until now, the European countries had been content to channel security matters through NATO and to focus the EU's attention on economic issues.

Need for it's own army:

- It is being said that one of the ways of addressing the problem of European security after 'Brexit' is a deep integration between the armed forces of member countries. The idea to build such a European army was also supported by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and several other 'Old World' political figures.
- It is believed that an independent army would enable the union to be taken more seriously as an international force.
- At a time when the EU is involving itself more in undertaking security operations, such as tackling people-smuggling gangs in the Mediterranean and piracy in Somalia, it clearly makes sense for participating states to work together. A single EU military force offers a better answer than the status quo to the host of security problems that beset the UK, the European Union and the region as a whole.

Concerns associated with this move:

- Such a proposition is dangerous because, by establishing its own command structure, the EU is setting itself up as a direct rival to Nato.
- It is also being said that creating a two-tier defence alliance that would split resources and benefit no one but Russia.
- Also, there are not enough human resources for the new army.

Challenges ahead:

Up until today, a “joint force” has always meant a force composed of separate national military units put together into a bigger force and commanded jointly, where all participating countries have their own representatives and the decisions are made on the political level based on consensus, and then translated into common military action on the ground.

- However, speaking about the more ambitious type of “joint force”, which is a common capability, it usually means that there would be individual servicemen and women, employed by a supranational body – in this case the European Union. **This is very difficult to achieve in the defence realm because there has never been, in modern history, this kind of common army where you have an institution like the European Union having its own army.** It has always been the first kind of “joint force”, where you have states having own army and co-operating together.
- The proposed army also cannot be a panacea for the “terrorist disease.” The fight against terrorists does not need more troops, but extensive and professional law enforcement agencies, a wide network of agents and other anti-terrorist structures. These cannot be in a regular army with rockets, tanks, bombers and fighters – one does not fight against terrorists with heavy armour and military equipment.
- The EUA’s deployment and operations in support of common military objectives within or outside the EU territorial domain may also pose a dilemma for such member nations who follow what can be termed ‘neutral’ foreign policies.

Way ahead:

It is high time that Europeans cooperated more in defence, and delivered more in terms of defending Europe from different threats.

- They need more cooperation, they need to procure armaments together and integrate military units so that they are more effective when deploying them to fight threats, including instability in Europe’s southern neighbourhood, connected with terrorism, but also threats posed by Russian provocative force posturing and manoeuvres in Eastern Europe. That would be my reaction.
- Europeans need to deliver more in defence, particularly after so many years of cuts in defence budgets, after years of shrinking military spending and armed forces.

Conclusion:

Special formations are created for specific combat missions, to which each member country allocates units from its national armed forces. Some provide tank crews, some allocate missile personnel, some supply motorized infantry, signalers, repairers, rear troops, nurses and so on. It is unclear on what principle an integrated European army should be created. It would more likely appear that talk about a European army and its joint headquarters is another attempt to set up a new bureaucratic structure for European officials to comfortably exist, producing paperwork and public declarations, just as it is done in the EU and PACE. The success of nascent efforts within the EU towards military integration will depend on the clarity that can be obtained on the latter's role in a dynamic security context, strategic consensus within the union, and the ability of member countries to reconcile their existing commitments within the NATO framework vis-à-vis a EUA. Due cognizance of US perceptions on the matter will also be of utmost relevance. The role of the strongest economic and military powers in EU, namely Germany and France, will also be the most onerous in this respect.