EU–India Security and Defence Cooperation in the Twenty First Century: Challenges and Prospects

Arvind Kumar, Professor and Head, Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal

Malgorzata Bonikowska, President, Centre for International Relations, Warsaw

The EU-India cooperation in the security and defence sector has witnessed a major transformation especially in the last decade. During the 13th European Union-India summit held in March 2016 in Brussels, both sides endorsed the EU-India Agenda for Action 2020 as a common roadmap to jointly guide and strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership, including security and defence cooperation. This study examines EU's and India's perspectives on these issues, including an assessment of their degree of convergence – or divergence - regarding their bilateral approaches to security and defence cooperation. We argue in favour of increased collaboration between the two partners on a number of major security issues, including terrorism and the question of refugees. Furthermore, we assess the role of the EU in fighting piracy and promoting security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and discuss the prospect for India-EU cooperation in fighting piracy.

The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) emphasised closer cooperation among Member States in the areas of defence. They agreed to intensify efforts in developing defence capabilities by increasing investment and enhancing coordination among themselves. This perhaps has been the main aim of the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and defence (PESCO) whose main objective is to jointly develop defence capabilities and make them available for EU military operations.

Third states may exceptionally participate in PESCO projects. Since EU and India have agreed to strengthen cooperation and work towards tangibles outcomes on shared objectives such as counter-piracy, counter terrorism - including counter radicalisation - and cyber security, India's cooperation in PESCO projects would undoubtedly bolster the EU-India strategic partnership.

India believes that the EU is an important partner on security and defence issues. The articulation of India's threat perceptions are, by and large, similar to the threat perceptions developed by the EU. Both partners hold similar views on the risks emanating from terrorism, migration, cyber security, and maritime security.

The potential for a deeper bilateral engagement on these issues exists. Moreover, the EU-India Agenda for Action 2020 clearly mentions counter terrorism cooperation. India and the EU are currently in the process of developing a shared approach at the multilateral level for addressing global challenges and increase coordination.

In the maritime domain, both the EU and India have come a long way in understanding each other's role and how they can work together and protect their mutual interests. The new Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region in New Delhi (IFC – IOR) has recently linked up with the Maritime Security Centre - Horn of Africa (MSC – HOA) established by the EU NAVFOR Atalanta. The cyber domain is also an important area for EU-India security cooperation. It will help each other in protecting IT related infrastructure in addition to their critical infrastructure such as power grid, nuclear infrastructure, banking and finance, and railways. Overall, India and the EU would greatly benefit from working together in PESCO projects as part of their increased security and defence cooperation. However, both sides have not harnessed each other's potential. The following recommendations are offered to EU and Indian policy makers in view of boosting their strategic partnership.

Policy recommendations

- India and the EU could enhance their mutual understanding by constituting frequent dialogues on areas relating to security and defence cooperation.

- Following up on the recent EU's India strategy document, India should also come up with its strategy on the EU, with a greater focus on security and defence cooperation.

- The EU and India should intensify efforts in the counter terrorism cooperation and begin discussion on sharing intelligence information at a later stage.

- The EU and India could consider closer collaboration in the context of PESCO.

- Both the EU and India would benefit from sharing their experiences in addressing issues related to migration and borders management.

- The EU and India could work together to create maritime situational awareness with a greater focus on building human and technological capacity on information sharing, maritime surveillance, search and rescue missions and data collection.

- Cyber security cooperation should be given priority by the EU and India. The protection and security of critical information infrastructure would profit from their bilateral cooperation. The EU Cyber Security Act can be taken as an example for the evolution of India's cyber law which is under preparation and is expected to be released in 2020.