

Reducing Political Risk in EU Pooling and Sharing

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Executive Summary

Can states share political accountability by allowing common defence capability development, training of troops, or procurement of military equipment? Is the defence industry ready for Pooling and Sharing (PS)? Does PS have an intrinsic strategic value? What impact will PS have on European defence cooperation in institutional and operational terms?

This paper identifies the level of political risk attached to certain areas of PS and provides specific recommendations on how to reduce these risks. We introduce an innovative roadmap – the pyramid framework – to address and resolve these four critical questions. By doing so, this paper gives EU policy-makers a concise and effective manual to boost PS opportunities and move from the bottom to the top of the EU defence cooperation pyramid. A consistent framework for maintenance and training is key. This is a low-risk strategy which avoids potential loss in military and industrial capital and knowledge.

Further, EU member states should realise and commit themselves to a common market for procurement and R&D. Operationally, we argue that trust needs to grow at the sub-regional level in order to spill over into the regional level. We therefore recommend revising the current ATHENA-financial framework to provide a basic level of trust. Finally, we argue that the current ‘good-enough’ attitude and settling for the status quo will bear the risk of serious negative consequences for European security, and will increase the potential for countries (such as Russia or China) to cause an undesirable rift between different European countries.

Reducing Political Risk in EU Pooling and Sharing



Preface by Giovanni Faleg

Over the past six years, an increasingly volatile and unpredictable neighbourhood has taken shape to Europe's Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, resulting in uprisings and all kinds of cross-sector hazards, new risks and threats. As the United States shifted its attention towards the Pacific area, Europe has been urged to take on a broader range of responsibilities. The current situation, characterised by decreasing defence budgets following the financial crisis, has presented the EU with a set of new challenges affecting all areas of defence cooperation: operational and capability shortfalls, fragmentation of the defence industry and a lack of strategic foresight.

However, those circumstances have also created an unprecedented window of opportunity for European countries to deepen their security and defence cooperation, spearheaded by the November 2010 Ghent Framework (Biscop, 2011). NATO Smart Defense Agenda and EU Pooling and Sharing (PS) initiatives call for both: (1) merging of capabilities, while still separable on nation state level (pooling), and (2) creating common, non-separable multinational capabilities (sharing) (Molling, 2012).

PS has already had significant results. The European Defense Agency's (EDA) PS endeavour kicked off in 2011 and was expanded further by successive Steering Board meetings. EU member states are also intensifying PS cooperation across bilateral (Franco-British cooperation), sub-regional (Nordic countries, Visegrad Group) or political groupings (the Weimar triangle). Last, but not least, the December 2013 European Council session on Defence has placed emphasis on PS as pivotal for the development of four key operational enablers: drones, air-to-air refueling capacity, satellite communication and cyber.

However, notwithstanding the impetus provided by the Council as well as by the EDA's initiatives, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) struggles to take off. Member states show themselves to be divided and slow when deciding over the use of forces. Capabilities and harmonisation goals are lagging. With substantial differences in strategic interests and cultures, the implementation of the PS agenda may turn into a paper tiger. Therefore, the question arises as to how the PS agenda can meet Europe's political realities.



As the author of these policy recommendations rightly suggests, reducing political risk (for instance through confidence-building measures aimed at reducing uncertainty), can decisively help EU member states scaling up their PS initiatives. This paper, therefore, will show the extent to which an innovative roadmap – the pyramid framework – can address and resolve four critical questions for the future of European defence, discussed during the Roundtable Session on Pooling & Sharing during the Liberal International Annual meeting in Rotterdam (24 April 2014). These discussed the hot topics of Sovereignty, Industry, Strategy and a European Army: Can states share political accountability by allowing common defence capability development, training of troops, or

procurement of military equipment? Is the defence industry ready for PS? Does PS have an intrinsic strategic value? What impact will PS have on European defence cooperation in institutional and operational terms?

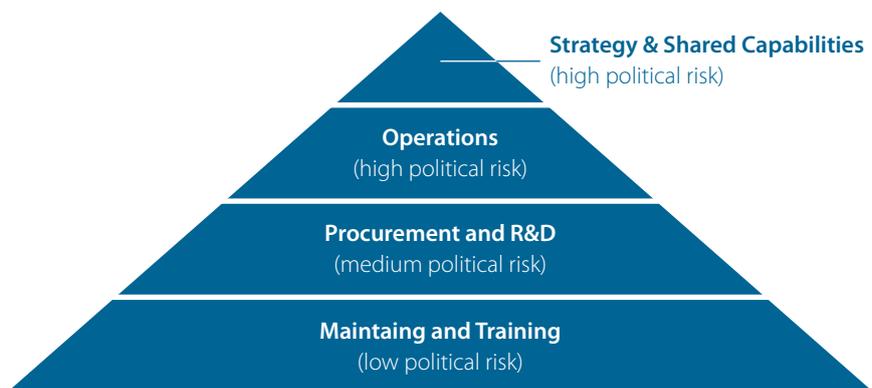
The pyramid conceptualises levels of cooperation in defence according to the level of political risk they entail. By providing specific recommendations on how to reduce such risk, this paper gives EU policy-makers with a concise and effective manual to boost PS opportunities and reach the top of the pyramid of EU defence cooperation.

Reducing Political Risk in EU Pooling and Sharing through the Pyramid Framework

Advocates of pooling and sharing military capabilities have been confronted with limited progress in the absence of two driving factors:

1. A military threat justifying stronger cooperation;
2. Equality in PS initiatives and domestic political realities, and in particular EU member states' willingness to overcome political risk.

This paper focuses on solutions to help EU member states reduce political risk when engaging in PS programs. Four levels of risk have been established, ranging from low to high:



We conclude that:

- PS is being used to its highest potential within the maintaining and training component. The commonalities between countries (similar size, common regional history, largely similar military doctrines, and preferring same type of operations), in combination with the tit-for-tat-principle by which all participants have a clear benefit, has led to permanent structures for cooperation. Therefore this type of cooperation can serve as a framework for new initiatives.
- The bottleneck lies within procurement and R&D, as long as the defence market remains rigidly closed and driven by domestic political considerations, further progress (such as operational cooperation) will not take place. Since the common market is at the heart of the European Union, policy-makers cannot afford to allow certain sectors to abstain from fair and open competition. Especially in a sector which heavily depends on innovation. In addition, the negative side effects go beyond the defence market alone: since large part of the produce is dual use, other sectors – such as telecommunication, aviation - are victims of circumventing import and export strategies. A first step thus would be to critically reassess the current licensing arrangements;
- The financial ATHENA-framework makes it even less appealing for countries to participate; a minimum contribution for every member state (as in NATO, certain small % of every member state their GDP) solves the free-rider effect. Initiatives for common operations should be encouraged in order to enhance interoperability.



- It is too early to formulate common European defence strategies, attempting to run before you can walk create paper tigers that will increase scepticism, and ultimately becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, the absence of a common strategy is no proof of the EU not needing one. The EU cannot afford to sleepwalk through an insecure neighbourhood. Therefore the EDA and the European External Action Service need to formulate common basic criteria for national strategies in order to converge national defence planning.

These observations and the application of a pyramid framework for PS leads to the following roadmap:

1. There needs to be a **consistent framework for maintenance and training**,
2. European member states should see **cross-border transfer of defence equipment between EU member states as no threat and simplify the licensing requirements in order to intensify common procurement and R&D**;
3. In terms of **operational** aspects trust needs to grow at the sub-regional level, to spill over at the regional one. **Revising the current ATHENA-financial framework can provide a basic level of trust**. Furthermore, initiatives that increase the level of common military operations will establish that and will provide a useful vehicle that enhances interoperability at the same time;
4. **The current 'good-enough' attitude and settling for the status quo will bear the risk of serious negative consequences for European security.**

I. State of Play

Scrutinising previous sub-regional PS initiatives shows that the following six factors influence the success or failure of deeper cooperation to pool and share military assets.

First, strategic culture is crucial, since it filters our views on how and when to use shared forces if they are built. The Visegrád cooperation, for instance, has high potential of success in this area. It formed in the chaos of Soviet collapse. All four countries intervened in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan; none took part in the Libyan war. Strategy, however, is difficult to ensure, as culture and priorities can change. The French and British cooperated in the case of the Libya campaign, but only minimally on intervention in francophone sub-Saharan African.

Second, geography is critical to minimise risk and maximise convenience and strategic positioning.

Third, trust is fundamental and can only be built over time. The Nordic countries exhibit this to an absolute level, in contrast to the French and British.

Fourth, size and compatibility matter as all three groupings are amongst countries of similar size and ability. This reflects the significance of the equal concerns of the *free-rider* and the *master-servant problem*.



Fifth, equal access for defence companies is necessary to allow partnerships to endure, as losses for defence companies must be evenly spread. If some countries protect their defence companies more than others, these asymmetries create friction that can cause co-operation to unravel. This is a sticking point in Franco-British cooperation.

Finally, clarity of intentions must push partners to commit to pursuing a joint agenda. There is a strict difference between cooperating in order to cut costs and cooperating in order to enhance integration. Each may be valid, but the intention matters. The Franco-British alliance is guilty of being a money-saving initiative dressed as a security and integration initiative. This can lead to strategic confusion and failure of cooperation.

All examples seem to demonstrate that the so-called 'islands of cooperation' approach to PS works because of years of trust, shared interest and vision. At the same time, as the example of NORDEFECO shows, these factors are necessary, but sometimes not enough to overcome heavy transaction costs. On the other hand, bilateral arrangements, as opposed to multilateral ones, do not smoothen cooperation. The case of France and Britain shows that even the prospect of cost cutting by sharing on a bilateral level, hence with lower transaction costs, results in serious coordination problems.

On that account, it can be concluded that sheer shared interests do not always suffice. In the absence of a common threat, which stimulates common responses across all levels of military engagement, deeper cooperation and integration in defence tends to be held back. As in fact history demonstrates that states will only forgo their own military independence if they have little other choice than to do so in order to defeat a common threat. The Visegrád Group originally formed along these lines in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, cooperation weakened as the threat started to vanish.

Advocates of P&S should therefore be prepared for the possibility of limited progress in the absence of two driving factors:

1. A military threat justifying stronger cooperation
2. Equality in PS initiatives and domestic political realities, and in particular EU member states' willingness to overcome political risk.

Since the absence of a military threat is exogenous, we will focus on solutions to help EU member states reduce political risk when engaging in PS programs.

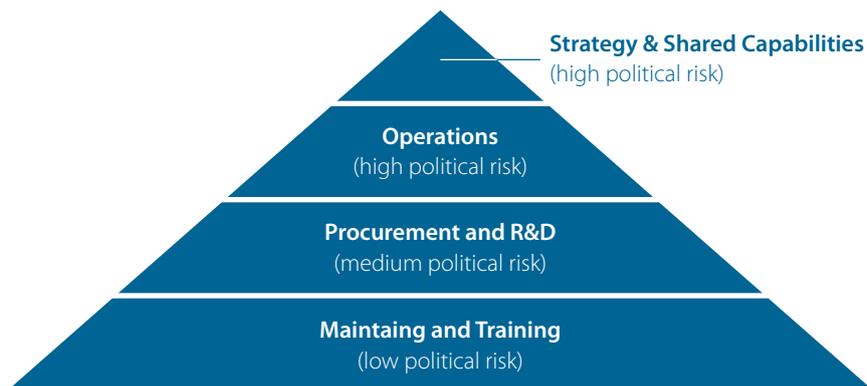
II. The Solution: Tackling Political Risk at 4 Levels of Defense Cooperation

To address this question, we develop a pyramid framework based on the concept of political risk. According to this framework, PS can be divided into four levels of cooperation:

- a) Maintaining and training;
- b) Procurement and R&D;
- c) Operations;
- d) Capabilities and Strategy.

From an analysis of current PS initiatives at the sub-regional level (cf. section 2), we observe that chances of successful implementation have been higher in maintaining and training than in the other levels. The variation can be explained through the concept of political risk. Political risk is defined as those sets of political choices that may undermine the stability or survival of government parties or coalitions. The risk underlying political choice is determined by external factors, such as the lack of trust in other countries' commitment when engaging multilateral defence projects; as well as by internal accountability, since governments are accountable to their electorate. Accordingly, while the amount of political risk is insignificant in maintenance and training, it becomes very high when cooperation involves a loss of sovereignty, such as in long-term capacity building and in the formulation of common strategic doctrines.

Therefore, reducing political risk (for instance through confidence building measures aimed at reducing uncertainty), can help EU member states move from the bottom of the pyramid (cf. figure 1) to the top, hence scaling up their PS initiatives. The following sections provide a more detailed description of the state of the art of PS cooperation in each level and options to reduce political risk. Conclusions will show the extent to which this roadmap can help policy-makers resolve the critical questions for the future of European defence.



III. Making PS Work: Applying the Pyramid Framework

Maintenance and training

In times of austerity it can be a risky option to completely cancel a certain capability. Whereas for a company, reviving an earlier cancelled department can take up to four years, roadmaps for new (or reviving earlier abandoned) military capabilities take a timeframe of at least twenty years (e.g. EDA future capability plan, 2008). Even though the cost reduction is imminent on the balance sheet, the cancelation of an entire capability bears the risk of destruction of capital in the long run. Not only in terms of military capabilities, but industrial capabilities (and thus jobs). By pooling maintenance, the capability can be preserved on a smaller scale instead of being lost (e.g. BENESAM cooperation between the Netherlands and Belgium, which decided to share the maintenance costs of mine sweepers and frigates).

The political risk of sharing the costs of maintenance in order to maintain certain capabilities is low. When it comes to small-scale regional initiatives, such as BENESAM, the commonalities (both small states with common regional history, both largely similar military doctrines, and both prefer multilateral operations) in combination with the tit-for-tat-principle by which all participants have a clear benefit has even led to a permanent structure. Task specialisation for maintenance has taken place as well as a coordination of planning between the Belgian and Dutch fleets (even during operations).

When it comes to joint training, the political risk is virtually nonexistent: training national troops with (a subset of) European countries is no taboo in a time where virtually no European country operates on a unilateral basis. In order to enhance interoperability during these missions, NATO organises in-depth training with member states. However, those initiatives with a permanent character are bilateral. France and Germany both train Tiger helicopter crews in Le Luc and share the annual budget for this training center (NATO, 2013: 5). France and the United Kingdom have set up an exchange program 'to provide RAF pilots and engineers with experience of operating the A400M' (Gov.uk, 2014:1).

Within the component of maintaining and training, PS is being used to its highest potential. The commonalities between countries (similar size, common regional history, largely similar military doctrines, and preferring same type of operations) in combination with the tit-for-tat-principle by which all participants have a clear benefit lead to permanent structures. Therefore this type of cooperation can serve as a framework for new initiatives

Procurement and R&D

Existing agreements on procurement and R&D are mostly regional in nature, or are made between countries with similar security rationales.

A regional example is NORDEFECO (2009), which comprises Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway and aims for 'closer practical cooperation in capability development' (NORDEFECO, 2009). NORDEFECO clearly states that it has no intention to align the political or military aspirations, but solely strives for more effectiveness in procurement. A second example, more based on similar security rationale, is the Franco-British Defence Cooperation (2010). Even though some operational intents are mentioned, the main focus lies on materials and equipment.



The political risk of common procurement is medium. The highly publicised costs surrounding the F35 (or, JSF) programme demonstrate how procurement and parallel research and development of military means can cause public scrutiny. The agreements that have been made in the area of joint procurement are mainly concentrated at opening up the defence market between a limited number of European regional partners. This shows that a top-down approach in order to open up the defence market, as the European Commission in close co-operation with the EDA are trying to do, will only have limited results as long as the national member states are not up to it. This reaches the core of the second issue identified, namely the catch 22 in where both the member states and the national defence industries find themselves in.

Currently, political arguments prevail. Since the ten biggest defence spenders in the EU account for more than 90% of whole EU defence outlay (Overhage, 2012: 33), the potential free-rider problem becomes part of the political consideration to make an effort (or not). Even though there is a financial aspect, this is clearly a political argument since the defence outlay is being paid by member states, and thus taxpayers' money. The current industrial overcapacity and duplication (Gili, 2012), has been a direct result of these types of domestic political considerations in an international market.

At the same time, the defence market (due to the large national interests at stake) is not a normal market to which standard market mechanisms always apply. Since the output of the military is a non-quantifiable public service (security), it becomes difficult to make an adequate cost and benefit analysis. Especially when taking political risk for the government into the equation.

The bottleneck lies within procurement and R&D, as long as the defence market remains rigidly closed and driven by domestic political considerations, further progress (such as operational cooperation) will not take place.

Operations

The largest part of European post-Cold War-missions were multinational and under international operational command (e.g. the UN or NATO). The difference between current-day multinational operations under non-national command and pooling and sharing operational resources is the fear of not being able to say 'no', and thus taking political responsibility for a mission you were not even willing to bear in the first place. The fear of 'losing control' over when, how and where national troops are deployed causes political reluctance towards permanently integrating operational resources. Today, multinational missions are a matter (for most of the European countries) of 'opting in', and decide on a case-to-case basis.

There are two reasons for the reluctance of permanently sharing operational capacities: (1) domestic political pressure, and (2) financial considerations. The first reason, domestic political pressure, can be illustrated by the case of Germany in 2003 and 2011. Besides heavy electoral opposition against the Iraq War in 2003, Germany openly opposed the Libya intervention of 2011. These (domestic) political considerations caused some operational problems, since Germany became very reluctant to let German crew fly the AWACs during the missions in Iraq and Libya (Overhage, 2012). The second reason, financial considerations, can be explained by the low incentivised framework of ATHENA operations. In this case, 90% of the financial burden of these operations is for the participating nations, making it less appealing for countries to pitch in.

The 'leaving options open' approach can also be seen in the bilateral memorandum between Germany and the Netherlands, where both ministers of defence expressed their intent to join the same UN, NATO or EU-led

operations. Still, there has been agreed to a 'permanent posting of exchange officers' at both ministries of Defence (The Federal Minister of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2013: 4). Thus far, formulating common strategic commitments, are done on a bilateral basis, with a significant regional component.

The financial ATHENA-framework makes it even less appealing for countries to participate; a minimum contribution for every member state (as in NATO, a pre-defined minimum percentage of every member state's GDP) solves the free-rider effect. Initiatives for common operations should be encouraged in order to enhance interoperability.

Sharing Capabilities and Strategy

There is a difference in joining the same multinational operations on an ad hoc basis, or committing oneself as a member state to the strategic needs of the other 27 EU member states. Sharing capabilities and the ultimate aim of member states (of NATO or EU) to 'specialise' in certain military capabilities, for instance the UK and France in nuclear capabilities, or the Netherlands and Belgium in maritime capabilities, will require a common long-term strategy. Specialisation and strategy cannot be seen as two separate goals since specialisation will cause countries to:

1. Significantly reduce their long-term strategic flexibility;
2. Increase the transfer of their political freedom to act into the hands of other states;
3. Cease providing highly visible ('sexy') capabilities to NATO's international missions;
4. Put their defence industry at risk of competition (Henius & MacDonald, 2012; 46-47).

These issues will become largely redundant once European countries have a shared long-term strategy, since sharing capabilities will leave room for countries to invest in minor strategic interests. However, as the Crimea crisis and the earlier energy crises demonstrated, neither the European member states nor NATO member states are capable of formulating a common strategy to counter Russian aggressive foreign policies. Here, we can clearly conclude that domestic political incentives prevail even in crisis – thereby potentially underestimating the risk of not having a clear strategy.

It is too early to formulate common European defence strategies, attempting to run before you can walk create paper tigers which will increase skepticism, and ultimately becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

IV. Conclusion

Thus far, large-scale, top-down initiatives such as NATO's 'smart defence' and EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) have proven to be too ambitious on a short-term basis. This does not mean that countries are not willing to pool and share their resources. On the contrary, initiatives have taken place from joint procurement, to maintenance and training, and all the way up to shared operational responsibilities. These observations and the application of a pyramid framework for PS leads to the following roadmap:

1. There needs to be a **consistent framework for maintenance and training**, both are low in terms of political risk, at the same time the risk of destruction of military and industrial capital and knowledge is being circumvented;
2. The current defence market, driven by domestic political considerations and lack of trust that creates a serious bottleneck and makes **common procurement and R&D** problematic. European member states should see **cross-border transfer of defence equipment between EU-member states as no threat and simplify the licensing requirements**. Especially since the defence market is a global market, the customers of the European defence industry will most likely be (because of shrinking budgets) non-EU member states;
3. In terms of **operational** aspects: countries with similar traditions with regards to the use of force are already taking the first steps towards permanent operational integration. The national interests of the member states are often too much apart to justify a permanent operational structure, but trust, geography and similarity of strategic cultures can help remove or reduce political risk and facilitate effective pooling and sharing. Trust needs to grow at the sub-regional level, to spill over at the regional one. **Revising the current ATHENA-financial framework can provide a basic level of trust**. Furthermore, initiatives that increase the level of common military operations will establish that and will provide a useful vehicle that enhances interoperability at the same time;
4. However, even though there are initiatives that work – member states need to act decisively. Window-dressing initiatives will provide no common ground for a common strategy. Even though it is understandable that domestic political incentives prevail, the lack of full implementation of initiatives will hinder the formation of a common security strategy. **The current 'good-enough' attitude and settling for the status quo will bear the risk of serious negative consequences for European security**, and will increase the possibilities for countries (such as Russia or China) to cause an undesirable rift between different European countries.

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Dieuwertje Kuijpers is a PhD Candidate at VU University and studies electoral risky behaviour of governments during military interventions. She is also secretary of the defence committee for the Dutch Liberal Party (VVD) and writes weekly columns on domestic politics and foreign policy for several Dutch op-ed websites.



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