Meeting note

Evolving security responses in a changing environment: opportunities and challenges

A policy discussion organised by the European Organisation of Military Associations (EUROMIL) and the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA), 27 February 2018

On 27 February 2018, the European Organisation of Military Associations (EUROMIL) and the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) organised a policy discussion on "Evolving security responses in a changing environment: opportunities and challenges" in Brussels. The discussion addressed the growing knowledge on what is commonly understood as the 'changing nature of violent conflict' and the need for new thinking around the responses.

The discussion, which was moderated by Olivia Caeymaex, Peace Programme Lead at QCEA, was introduced by speakers representing different perspectives, including Emmanuel Jacob, President of the EUROMIL, Sonya Reines-Djivanides, Executive Director of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO); Jamie Shea, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges; and Arnout Molenaar, Senior Expert in Defense Policy Matters at the EEAS Crisis Management and Planning Directorate.

Participants represented 13 organisations, including civil society, EU institutions, Permanent Representations to the EU, and faith based organisations. Under the Chatham House rule, they discussed the emerging security challenges and the changing role of international, regional and national institutions such as NATO, the EU and armed forces. The discussion also explored the risks and opportunities attached to blurring the lines between development and humanitarian responsibilities as well as civilian-military cooperation.

 The following elements were particularly highlighted:

I. A changing security context requires new responses, strategies and ambitions:

Participants highlighted emerging security challenges, including climate change, transnational organised crime, terrorism, cyberattacks, hybrid warfare, and pandemics. This shift in the perception of who the enemy is requires re-thinking in terms of response. The securitisation of migration was discussed, as well as root causes of conflict such as socio-economic frustrations and an increased sense of unfairness and inequality.

In the EU context, the last two years have seen numerous security focused initiatives, which one speaker perceived to be in response to security threats facing the Union, and partly also made possible by the changed political context within the EU, due to Brexit. The security initiatives include the European Defense Fund (EDF) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which aim to increase cooperation and synergy around defense. While underlining the new dynamic in the EU, there

were diverging perspectives on these developments. One challenge that was mentioned was that EU Member States have different priorities, threat assessments, and definitions of security. Some discussants perceived a common EU strategy as the way forward to build sufficient ambition for strengthening capacity, such as military recruitment and reserve pools. Others highlighted the need to re-think military responses through the lens of human security, noting that not every security challenge requires a military response.

II. The difficulties of differentiating internal/external security and the lack of straightforward responses:

Blurring lines between internal and external security was discussed as a particular challenge in today's environment where violent conflict is highly complex and ambiguous. There was debate around the idea that EU's current foreign policies have the ability to improve internal security. One participant noted that external policies needed to be based on human security and needed to address the local level. It was emphasised that understanding local perceptions of security was paramount to durable, sustainable security.

Participants agreed that today no one actor can work alone to deliver sustained security, indeed, strong collaboration between actors with diverse competencies is key to long-term success.

III. Various tools and institutions exist but need to be embedded in a broader, integrated strategy:

The discussion highlighted that diplomacy and coordination among different international actors are important. Several participants called for a strategy before implementing any form of engagement. This could be achieved through stronger channels of collaboration, communication and diplomacy. Such a strategy was seen to need both top-down and bottom-up approaches, as security cannot be imposed from the outside but requires local leadership and political will. One speaker drew on lessons from Afghanistan and Libya, where a wider political strategy and inter-agency cooperation was seen to be lacking. Creating representative, inclusive structures in order to build durable security systems was seen as necessary in the region.

In the current strategic environment, institutions such as the EU and NATO were seen to need fresh thinking and tools. NATO is already doing more research to refine its understanding of the culture and sensitivities before engaging in countries to prevent further harm. One speaker mentioned that the EU and NATO could contribute to the global order through a normative structure that can help set boundaries for what is allowed in the new security environment.

IV. The armed forces and civil society are evolving:

Security concepts, armed forces, and civil society have all evolved over the last 30 years. The end of the Cold War marked a reduction in military personnel and defense budgets. Military missions took a new format and the tasks of the military evolved, such as adopting humanitarian roles. In recent years, the concept of war has changed. Soldiers are no longer simply professional fighters but skilled employees. In European countries such as in Belgium, soldiers have been seen to take on roles usually reserved for the police, but are not always trained for these new roles.

There was discussion during the event about these changes, particularly with regards to EU military budgets. Some participants found that previous cuts meant that the EU is now less prepared to engage internationally. Others found recent calls for the 2% increase in defense budgets low compared to the Cold War period. Strengthened coordination between EU-NATO was seen as a way to share burdens, for instance in improving military mobility, as well as preventing budget and capability fragmentation. The discussion also highlighted the importance of thinking about how budgets are spent in terms of cost effectiveness as well as human security.

In this evolving environment, civil society is also changing, with a professionalisation of the non-profit sector observed in recent years. One participant highlighted the need to build trust between different actors, which is particularly challenging when there is high rotation on the ground of field staff. Some perceived the focus on the security-development nexus as reinforcing the shrinking space for humanitarian and civil society actors in the field. Yet the role of civil society was seen as essential in sharing conflict and context analyses, helping the understanding of the root causes of conflict and the identification of appropriate long-term response.

V. There is a need to engage with a range of actors, including 'new' or 'unusual' actors such as faith based leaders and the private sector:

The discussion drew attention to the idea of developing structural dialogue with as many actors as possible involved in a crisis, such as personnel from different branches of the public sector and civil society, not only international NGOs but also grassroots organisations. There are also 'new' actors such as cyber experts from the public and private sectors. There is an opportunity to work with faith based organisations to monitor crisis situations, as many faith based communities have large representations both inside the EU and in countries where the EU has delegations and missions.

Working with a range of actors was seen to be an important part of a wider strategy that includes monitoring and evaluating the situation. Best practices and lessons learned exist and could be shared, particularly in terms of understanding conflict drivers but also pockets of peace. Impact assessments can better help actors understand their impact in the field.

VI. Diplomacy, governance, and do no harm strategies as starting points for cooperation:

The discussion raised common starting points in terms of synergies between civil society and the security sector. Diplomacy was seen as a way to facilitate communication. *Do no harm* was seen to be a principle that should underlie any work in the security sector. One speaker highlighted how it can ensure approaches are more cost-effective by minimising risk. Governance was seen to be important to all sectors, including security. A focus on governance in the armed forces entails democratic, transparent, and accountable processes and respect for human rights. Governance in the military was seen to be essential, as well as its mandate and background political message. In addition, it was said to be important for military personnel to know their rights so as to ensure they are respected, in third countries as well as in Europe.