



Twenty-Five Years of Excellence in Collaborative Research and Education

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Abstract: Twenty-five years after its creation, the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes continues to serve its stakeholders by adapting to new challenges and providing timely policy recommendations, as well as relevant education and training solutions. This article briefly summarizes the origins of the Consortium, its working modalities, and future opportunities.

Keywords: Partnership for Peace, PfP, defense, armed forces, security sector, governance, advanced distributed learning, emerging security challenges, Southeast Europe, South Caucasus, conflict studies, irregular warfare, hybrid threats.

Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall, followed soon afterward by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, was largely met with enthusiasm in policy circles¹ and among the general public. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved, and the states that were previously members of the Pact or (re)emerging from the Soviet Union embarked on a path of democratization and prosperity by introducing market mechanisms and enhancing individual freedoms. For the people in Eastern Europe, “Europe Whole, Free, and at Peace”² was not just a slogan but a

¹ See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1992).

² Timothy Garton Ash, “Europe Whole and Free,” *The New York Review*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/11/02/europe-whole-and-free-timothy-garton-ash>.

strategic goal. Established democracies in Europe and North America were willing to support their efforts.

Establishing the Partnership for Peace Consortium

NATO launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 as a platform to build trust and enhance cooperative security in the Euro-Atlantic space. Achieving this goal required preventing and, if necessary, defending against resurgent autocracies. The PfP program provided venues for bilateral cooperation between individual partner countries in the Euro-Atlantic area, as well as between partners and NATO.

By the mid-1990s, several NATO member states (e.g., the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and The Netherlands) and NATO itself, along with partner nations (e.g., Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland), had launched additional projects and initiatives beyond the PfP. These efforts aimed to support the former communist states in understanding and promoting democratic security and defense policymaking, civil-military relations, and civilian control of the armed forces. Later, these initiatives expanded to include security sector reform. Several countries also established dedicated “centers” to facilitate the transfer of knowledge on policymaking and democratic oversight. Examples include the Center for Civil-Military Relations³ in the United States, the Center for European Security Studies⁴ in Groningen, The Netherlands, the Center for Security Studies⁵ at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zurich, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy,⁶ and, later, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.⁷

These centers and other organizations conducted field studies, organized short courses and seminars, and, in the case of NATO, awarded fellowships to individuals and organizations to conduct studies related to democratization. A number of initiatives aimed to enhance the understanding of civilians and the military and to enhance (or, more accurately, to support the establishment of and nurture) the civilian capacity for defense and security policymaking among partners. These diverse initiatives, programs, and centers contributed to networking and building a community of experts, as well as establishing relevant defense education capacity. An example is the series of biannual International Security Forums hosted by Switzerland, alternating between Geneva and Zurich.

³ A Department of Defense organization within the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.

⁴ The Centre for European Security Studies (CESS), <https://cess.org/>.

⁵ Center for Security Studies (CSS), <https://gess.ethz.ch/en/research/institutes-and-centers/css.html>.

⁶ Geneva Centre for Security Policy, <https://www.gcsp.ch>.

⁷ Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, now Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, <https://www.dcaf.ch>.

Recognizing the need to coordinate these initiatives, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen proposed the creation of a PfP Consortium of defense academies and civilian institutes for security studies during the June 1998 defense ministerial meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). The proposal was co-sponsored by the Federal Republic of Germany.⁸ The proposal to establish the PfP Consortium was announced at the Third International Security Forum (ISF), held on October 19-21, 1998, in Zurich, Switzerland. Keynote speeches were delivered by Swiss Federal Councillor (Minister of Defense, Civil Protection, and Sports) Adolf Ogi and Lisa Bronson, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO Affairs.

Since 1996, partner countries have contributed to NATO-led peacekeeping operations in the Balkans. In April 1999, the NATO Washington Summit introduced a program to enhance training and education aimed at reinforcing the operational capabilities of partner countries⁹ and endorsed the creation of the PfP Consortium.¹⁰ In a wave of enthusiasm, many allied and partner countries joined the PfP Consortium to capitalize on its potential. The George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies and the NATO Defense College in Rome became members of the Consortium, and a small PfP Consortium secretariat was established at the Marshall Center in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

Working Modalities

In Secretary Cohen's vision, the PfP was to become the cornerstone of a cooperative security network of allies and partners, playing a preparatory role for NATO accession while being worthy of membership in its own right. As a spinoff "in the spirit of" the PfP, the PfP Consortium fulfilled this central role in the context of education and training, as well as by supporting policy through the transfer of knowledge and good practices identified through collaboration.

The PfP Consortium accomplished its mission through study and working groups, regular workshops and conferences, joint publications, the development and piloting of reference curricula, and, last but not least, *Connections* – the academic journal of the PfP Consortium. These activities address knowledge gaps, help overcome practical challenges, and increase *intellectual interoperability* between allies and partners. The articles in this special issue of *Connections* provide detailed information on all of these activities.

⁸ "Initiation of the Consortium by US Secretary of Defense William Cohen during an intervention at the meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council Defence Ministers (EAPC-D) in Brussels, Belgium, on June 12, 1998," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 7, no. 3 (2008): 77-80, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.07>.

⁹ "Partnership for Peace programme," *What We Do*, NATO, last updated June 28, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm.

¹⁰ "Endorsement of the Consortium in the report, "Towards a Partnership for the 21st Century – The Enhanced and More Operational Partnership," Appendix E, Improved Training and Education in the Partnership for Peace," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 7, no. 3 (2008): 100-105, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.11>.

An early (and occasionally recurring) question arose regarding how to organize the Consortium's work in response to the evolving security landscape, technological opportunities, and respective education and training requirements. Two distinct options are available. First, the Consortium could evolve into a centralized organization closely linked to NATO and the EAPC, contributing to the implementation of their approved policies. In this option, the Consortium would function as "NATO's executive agent" with sustained and predictable funding. The second option could be described as a "consortium of the willing" model, where interested allies and partners join certain activities and share the financial burden. While the administration under this second option is less predictable, it allows the Consortium to remain highly agile and adaptable to changing needs and requirements.

NATO had 16 members in 1998 when the Consortium was created. By 2024, the number of members had doubled to 32. While the first option offers certain advantages, NATO's principle of making all major decisions by consensus may, in specific cases, slow down the launch of new activities. Therefore, to date, the second option has been the preferred *modus operandi* in practice.

Through a combination of formal and informal mechanisms, however, the Consortium has collaborated with NATO in several working groups, the design and publication of reference curricula, and particularly in the implementation of the Defense Education Enhancement Program. NATO also contributes to the Consortium's leadership by serving on its governance boards, albeit as one of several decision-makers rather than the lead executive or "center of gravity."

Glimpse into the Future

In June 2024, a special session during the NATO Ministerial in Brussels brought together defense leaders of eight nations and the (then) NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg. The session recognized the value and achievements of the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes and reaffirmed the nations' commitments to the PFP Consortium.

The personal participation of U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin and German Minister of Defense Boris Pistorius indicated the commitment of the two founding countries to sustaining the core "infrastructure" of the PFP Consortium, notably its secretariat in Garmisch-Partenkirchen and its alignment with the U.S.-German bilateral George C. Marshall Center.

Although many of the partner countries from the 1990s have since become NATO members, the demand for collaboration between allies and partners persists. Today, nations such as Ukraine, Moldova, and partners from the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, and Central Asia continue to work with the PFP Consortium. The Consortium is well-positioned to respond to these partner demands as well as to address new thematic challenges. The articles in this special issue propose several ideas, such as establishing a working group on democratic resilience. Additionally, some of the emerging security- or technology-related chal-

lenges—such as artificial intelligence in defense and security or countering foreign information manipulation and interference—could be addressed in new reference curricula.

Since some of the main stakeholders, particularly partner and allied defense academies, participate in relevant EU-funded programs, such as Erasmus+,¹¹ the Consortium would benefit from exploring the opportunities for cooperation with the European Union.

Finally, *Connections*, the flagship publication of the Consortium, is already established as a high-ranking and reputable academic journal. It holds the potential to become the publication outlet of first choice and a source of reliable, high-quality teaching and learning materials for the defense academies in NATO and partner countries.

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The PfP Consortium has always relied on knowledgeable and inspired individuals, many of whom contribute as volunteers. With thoughtful leadership and a dedicated network of experts, it will continue to serve its stakeholders and the broader security community, fostering a safer and prosperous Euro-Atlantic space.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Partnership for Peace Consortium or its governance stakeholders.

About the Author

Prof. Todor Tagarev is a former Minister of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria (2013, 2023–2024). He has been a member of the Editorial Board of *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* since 2004. Over the years, he has contributed to the activities of several working groups and teams responsible for designing the reference curricula on defense institution building, integrity, cybersecurity, and hybrid threats and hybrid warfare. In 1998, Dr. Tagarev participated in the Third International Security Forum and the first conference of the PfP Consortium.

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¹¹ “Erasmus+. EU programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport,” European Commission, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>.

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