



Sean S. Costigan, *Connections QJ* 24, no. 1 (2025): 11-16
<https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.24.1.01>

Reflections

When It Is Dark Enough, You Can See the Stars: A 25th Anniversary Reflection

Sean S. Costigan

*George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies,
<https://www.marshallcenter.org>*

Abstract: Reflecting on the 25th anniversary of the Partnership for Peace Consortium, this introductory article examines its pivotal role in fostering peace, security, and cooperation across Europe and beyond. Established in a tumultuous post-Soviet landscape, the Consortium has navigated complex geopolitical shifts while advocating for collaborative approaches to conflict resolution, progressive visions for Europe and NATO, and the achievement of sustainable peace. By reviewing the articles in this issue of *Connections* and the Consortium's contributions to regional stability, democratic reform, and educational development, this article showcases the transformative impact of its various working and study groups. Topics range from defense cooperation in Southeast Europe to the evolution of military education in response to contemporary security challenges, such as hybrid warfare and disinformation. The article emphasizes the ongoing need for innovative governance and adaptive methodologies to address emerging threats, as well as the importance of historical understanding in shaping modern security strategies. Ultimately, this reflection underscores the Consortium's enduring commitment to enhancing global security cooperation and its vital role in promoting democratic values amidst evolving security challenges.

Keywords: PfP Consortium, regional stability, conflict studies, governance, resilience, education and training, Defense Education Enhancement Program, reference curriculum, change management.

As the Partnership for Peace Consortium (PfPC) celebrates its 25th anniversary, we reflect on its enduring mission of fostering peace, security, and cooperation across Europe and beyond. More than a testament to the longevity of our work, this milestone speaks to the vitality and adaptability of the Consortium, which

since 1999 has been at the forefront of a dynamic dialogue on security and defense. Through its diverse network of committed individuals at defense academies, think tanks, educational institutions, and policy halls, the Consortium has ably contributed to shaping a more stable and interconnected world, continuously advocating for understanding and cooperative approaches to resolving conflicts and building sustainable peace.

As a brief tour of the historical timeline will tell us, the Consortium was founded in a period of massive upheaval following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The desire for rapid progress and shedding the past was palpable. Yet change, as history teaches us, is seldom linear and rarely immediate. Instead, it is most often a gradual process, occasionally marked by apparent reversals that future students of history may seek to plot in time.¹ But, to echo Heraclitus, we ought to remind ourselves that change is also constant. As we reflect on the past 25 years, such historical and philosophical appreciations take on profoundly practical and personal meaning. Indeed, the people behind the PfPC have seen multiple world-changing events, often in rapid succession, all the while staying true to the collective aspiration to build a safer, stable, and liberal future.

The academic and policy articles examined in this issue of *Connections* reflect the transformative role of the PfPC in fostering regional stability, defense cooperation, democratic reform, transparency, capacity building, combating corruption, and educational development. These works cover a range of topics—from geopolitical strategies in Eastern and South Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus to modern approaches in military education and situating historical memories in the context of today's challenges—all of which are linked by their focus on understanding and promoting international security.

Plamen Pantev's article reviews the 25-year history of the PfPC's Regional Stability in South East Europe Study Group, emphasizing its impact on transforming South East Europe's defense and security sectors. Through academic research, education, training, and cooperation, this PfPC group has contributed to significant reforms aimed at integrating these nations into NATO and the European Union (EU). Pantev underscores the political and theoretical foundations that have guided the group's work, including the challenges posed by competing regional concepts such as the "Russian world" and the "Serbian world." Despite these regional challenges, the article highlights ongoing efforts to internalize democracy in the region and advance integration into NATO and the EU, concluding that continued work is necessary for regional stability and long-term peace.

Another PfPC group—The Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group—was introduced at the 13th Annual Conference of the PFP Consortium, held in Tbilisi, Georgia. Supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence, the group pursues three main goals: developing a cadre of security experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; building a network of constructive academic

¹ Roger D. Masters, "Gradualism and Discontinuous Change in Evolutionary Theory and Political Philosophy," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 12, no. 2-3 (1989): 281-301, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1750\(89\)90051-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1750(89)90051-1).

and policy-making influence by identifying and involving academic and civil society representatives; and considering conflicting regional narratives to enable new analyses and perspectives to regional security challenges.² A recent volume, co-edited by Christoph Bilban, Frederic Labarre (senior advisor), and George Vlad Niculescu, co-chair of the South Caucasus group, provides an overview of the current status and foreseen challenges of regional stability.³

This special issue includes a critical update of Stephanie Fenkart's contribution to that volume. In it, she examines the changing role of the European Union in the South Caucasus, exploring how it might act as a force for peace in the face of complex geopolitical dynamics involving Russia, Turkey, and Iran. The article identifies EU interests such as securing energy and trade routes, countering Russian influence, and promoting stability. Fenkart advocates for a comprehensive EU strategy that includes credible enlargement processes, especially for Georgia, and proposes that the European Union could enhance its peacebuilding role by fostering economic investment, supporting civil society, and facilitating reconciliation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The article concludes that while the EU's influence in the region is limited, a well-balanced approach could help stabilize the South Caucasus.

In her article, Cristina Brăgea discusses the evolution and impact of the Euro-Atlantic Conflict Studies Working Group, originally established in 1999 as the Military History Working Group. Since its inception, this group has expanded its focus from military history to analyzing contemporary security challenges, including hybrid warfare and disinformation, reflecting changes in understanding and aligning with NATO's priorities. The group serves as a bridge between history and strategy, fostering international cooperation and intellectual exchange among military professionals, scholars, and policymakers. Over time, the group has been agile: it adapted by rebranding and broadening its scope, contributing significantly to professional military education and regional cooperation, all the while maintaining the through line of history and the need for sustained historical analysis for the understanding of modern security issues. By fostering engagement with historical memory in innovative ways, the Euro-Atlantic Conflict Studies Working Group helps promote understanding in this critical time.

The rapid evolution of warfare and its demands for adaptive training systems is the focus of Aaron Presnall, Michael Nickolaus, and Steve Bank's article, which introduces the concept of "train while you fight." This approach integrates continuous learning into operational activities, emphasizing the role of Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL) in building resilience. Presnall and his co-authors explore how new instructional strategies, including personalized learning and on-demand content delivery, enable military forces to maintain readiness and

² "Regional Stability in The South Caucasus Study Group Factsheet," <https://www.pfp-consortium.org/study-groups/regional-stability-south-caucasus>.

³ Christoph Bilban, Frederic Labarre, and George Niculescu, eds., *Does the EU Need a Strategy for the South Caucasus?* (Vienna, Austria: Federal Ministry of Defence, 2024), https://www.bmlv.gv.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/rssc_sgi_24_14_webversion.pdf.

adaptability in an increasingly complex environment. The article highlights the importance of multinational cooperation in developing robust training systems capable of responding to the challenges of modern warfare.

Next, with a global eye on events and a comprehensive analysis of historical decisions, Todor Tagarev and Philipp Fluri explore the evolution of initiatives by NATO and partner countries to enhance good governance in military and security forces over the past three decades.⁴ The article details five waves of focus: civil-military relations and democratic control of armed forces, defense institution building, security sector reform, building integrity and reducing corruption, and strengthening democratic resilience. Further, the authors do well to remind us that NATO is not simply a defensive alliance but, as stated in its founding treaty, is an alliance dedicated to defending the “freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and rule of law.” The authors expertly review the history, research, and educational products of the PfPC and other organizations supporting these initiatives, thereby building a path for future policy scholarship. Looking ahead, Tagarev and Fluri propose establishing a working group on democratic resilience within the PfPC to address the increasing internal and external threats to democracies, particularly in light of recent geopolitical events. The authors conclude by emphasizing the ongoing need for sound civil-military relations and democratic oversight of armed forces, noting that the PfPC has a proven record of supporting NATO and is especially well-positioned to make further needed gains in security through timely and innovative research and education.

The intersection of international security and emerging technologies is further explored by Jean-Marc Rickli and Gëzim Vllasi, who examine the shift from traditional, threat-centric security models to risk-based approaches, particularly in relation to technological innovations.⁵ Rickli and Vllasi discuss how artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and quantum computing while promising substantial benefits, pose new vulnerabilities should they be weaponized. The authors advocate for a multi-stakeholder approach and stress the need for international collaboration and innovative governance frameworks to mitigate the risks posed by these technologies. Rickli and Vllasi’s analysis underscores the importance of adapting to the changing landscape of global security through strategies that address catastrophic and existential risks while leveraging NATO’s efforts to combat cyber and hybrid threats.

⁴ Todor Tagarev and Philipp Fluri, “From Civil-Military Relations to Resilience: The Fifth Wave of Strengthening Democracy through Research and Education,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 24, no. 1 (2025): 73-90, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.24.1.06>.

⁵ Jean-Marc Rickli and Gëzim Vllasi, “The Weaponization of Emerging Technologies and Their Impact on Global Risk: A Perspective from the PfPC Emerging Security Challenges Working Group,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 24, no. 1 (2025): 91-112, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.24.1.07>.

Tim Dreifke and Iryna Lysyckina's article delves into the development of reference curricula by the PfPC, aiming to modernize military education and align it with NATO standards. The article discusses the theoretical foundations of these curricula, focusing on educational standardization and military transformation. Using a case study from the Moldovan Military Academy, Dreifke and Lysyckina demonstrate the successful implementation of these curricula and the importance of fostering intellectual interoperability among NATO allies and partner nations. Their analysis illustrates the effectiveness of these curricula in meeting both educational and operational needs.

In the context of educational reforms, John Hagen and Iryna Lysyckina's article discusses the success of the PfPC's faculty development initiatives under the Defense Education Enhancement Program (DEEP). Over nearly two decades, DEEP has sought to modernize Professional Military Education (PME) in NATO partner countries by promoting student-centered learning and democratic values. Hagen and Lysyckina identify the key factors influencing the success of these initiatives, such as the professionalism of training teams and the receptiveness of participating institutions. They emphasize the need for continuous adaptation to keep pace with technological advancements and educational reforms.

Lastly, the 25-year evolution of the PfPC is comprehensively examined by Sae Schatz, Olaf Garlich, and Scott Buchanan, who use the Theory of Change methodology to assess the impact of the organization's initiatives.⁶ The PfPC, first proposed by then U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen in 1998 and formally established in 1999, has focused on enhancing intellectual interoperability, security sector cooperation, and institutional capacity building. Schatz and colleagues emphasize the PfPC's role in fostering collaboration across nations, especially through projects that address emerging security challenges. They highlight the importance of these efforts in advancing democratic principles and promoting regional stability, concluding that the PfPC's holistic approach is vital for enhancing global security cooperation.

Taken together, these articles reflect the PfPC's significant role in advancing defense cooperation, educational reform, and regional stability. From geopolitical and emerging challenges to fostering collaboration in South East Europe and the South Caucasus and modernizing military education through innovative curricula and training, the PfPC continues to support the development of NATO and EU partnerships, addressing both traditional and emerging security challenges.

As dedicated readers of this journal know, the pages of *Connections* provide a platform for this essential conversation, offering singular insights and policy analysis from experts around the world. In this issue and in all future issues, we reaffirm the Consortium's unwavering commitment to the cause of peace and

⁶ Sae Schatz, Olaf Garlich, and Scott Buchanan, "A Theory of Change: 25 Years of the Partnership for Peace Consortium," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 24, no. 1 (2025): 149-168, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.24.1.10>.

security, knowing that even when our resilience is tested, our values remain resolute and our collective efforts indispensable.

The early 20th-century American historian Charles Beard, who co-founded The New School for Social Research, once penned a summation of the lessons of history in four sentences:

Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad with power.

The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small.

The bee fertilizes the flower it robs.

When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.⁷

If power, time, interconnectedness, and perspective are integral to understanding history and to our roles and responsibilities as good stewards for the future, then in our increasingly complex geopolitical landscape, the cooperative efforts in security reform and capacity building of the Partnership for Peace Consortium are more critical than ever. Indeed, the pursuit of security, particularly in Europe, endures – especially in the face of physical violence, hybrid threats, and other deep challenges that threaten our gains in human dignity, progress, and economic vitality achieved since the end of the Cold War. While the path to lasting security is often slow and fraught with setbacks, our shared goals of peace and security stand.

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

Dr. **Sean Costigan** is a Professor at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies and Chair of the Editorial Board of the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes.

E-mail: sean.costigan@marshallcenter.org

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7303-1321>

⁷ As quoted in Arthur H. Secord, “Condensed History Lesson,” *Readers’ Digest* 38, no. 226 (February 1941), 20.

Bibliography

- Bilban, Christoph, Frederic Labarre, and George Niculescu, eds., *Does the EU Need a Strategy for the South Caucasus?* (Vienna, Austria: Federal Ministry of Defence, 2024), https://www.bmlv.gv.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/rssc_sgi_24_14_webversion.pdf.
- Masters, Roger D., "Gradualism and Discontinuous Change in Evolutionary Theory and Political Philosophy," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 12, no. 2-3 (1989): 281-301, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1750\(89\)90051-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0140-1750(89)90051-1).
- Rickli, Jean-Marc, and Gëzim Vllasi, "The Weaponization of Emerging Technologies and Their Impact on Global Risk: A Perspective from the PfPC Emerging Security Challenges Working Group," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 24, no. 1 (2025): 91-112, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.24.1.07>.
- Schatz, Sae, Olaf Garlich, and Scott Buchanan, "A Theory of Change: 25 Years of the Partnership for Peace Consortium," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 24, no. 1 (2025): 149-168, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.24.1.10>.
- Secord, Arthur H., "Condensed History Lesson," *Readers' Digest* 38, no. 226 (February 1941), 20.
- Tagarev, Todor, and Philipp Fluri, "From Civil-Military Relations to Resilience: The Fifth Wave of Strengthening Democracy through Research and Education," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 24, no. 1 (2025): 73-90, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.24.1.06>.