



A Theory of Change: 25 Years of the Partnership for Peace Consortium

Sae Schatz,¹  Olaf Garlich,¹ and Scott Buchanan²

¹ Partnership for Peace Consortium, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, <https://www.pfp-consortium.org/>

² Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washinton, D.C., United States, <https://www.defense.gov/About/office-of-the-secretary-of-defense/>

Abstract: This article provides a brief overview of the 25-year history of the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes. It highlights the renewed international commitment to the Consortium and its principles, as observed during its 25th anniversary in 2024. The article then examines the Consortium through the Theory of Change concept, a logic modeling method for articulating how immediate actions link to long-term outcomes, particularly within complex systems. This approach analyzes the logical chain of events from the Consortium's three strategic focus areas—intellectual interoperability, security sector cooperation, and institutional capacity building—and connects them to its desired strategic impacts: increasing regional stability, enhancing global security cooperation to address transnational security challenges, and fostering a more peaceful world that shares values such as a commitment to democratic principles and the rules-based international order.

Keywords: intellectual interoperability, security sector, institutional capacity building, regional stability, security cooperation, NATO, Euro-Atlantic region.

Introduction

The Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes (abbreviated as either “PfP Consortium” or “PfPC”) is an international program dedicated to supporting defense and security cooperation, education, and capacity building across allied and partner nations. Currently, nine

nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) govern the PfPC. These nations invest in the PfPC to enhance regional stability, contribute to global security solutions, and encourage the uptake of values that provide common benefits, such as a commitment to the rules-based international order.¹

As Jens Stoltenberg, (then) NATO Secretary General, remarked in 2024²:

For 25 years you [the PfPC] have helped build trust and cooperation with our partners, enhancing our intellectual interoperability.... Keeping our people and nations safe is a very complex task, and one that our armies cannot do alone. We all have a part to play, including the network of institutions that this Consortium uniquely brings together across allied and partner countries. The close cooperation that you have fostered is important to enhance our collective security. So, thank you for everything you and your nations do. The more close partners and friends we have, the more integrated into NATO they are, the stronger we all become.

This article begins with a brief review of the foundations of the PfPC, including an annotated bibliography of publications that document its early years and a summary of the renewed international commitment to the PfPC and its principles, as observed during its 25th anniversary in 2024. Next, the article employs the Theory of Change concept to articulate how immediate interventions link to long-term impacts – a particularly important consideration for activities conducted in complex systems. This analysis helps to define the PfPC’s activities and their theorized contributions to downstream outcomes. Although merely a first step in defining PfPC’s Theory of Change model, this article attempts to create a framework for future critical inquiry and targeted impact evaluation.

Background

History and Foundations of the PfPC

Former U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen first proposed the PfPC in a speech during the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in Brussels on June 12, 1998.³ The U.S. Departments of State and Defense had coordinated these re-

¹ The governance stakeholders that oversee the PfPC include Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States as well as NATO International Staff. Romania was added to the PfPC leadership council in November 2024.

² Remarks from Jens Stoltenberg at the PfPC Signing Ceremony, 14 June 2024. See a video at “Signing Ceremony – Partnership for Peace with NATO Secretary General” (NATO935327), <https://www.natomultimedia.tv/app/asset/703929>.

³ For a primary source see U.S. Joint State/Defense Action Message (1998); a summary of the EAPC defense ministers meeting is available at https://www.nato.int/cps/bu/natohq/official_texts_25967.htm. See also “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

marks with their German counterparts, and Germany formally co-signed the proposal. The United States also socialized the PfPC concept with several collaborating nations, including early supporters Switzerland and Bulgaria, who joined the PfPC governance council shortly after its announcement. Less than a year later, on April 24, 1999, at the North Atlantic Council meeting in Washington, D.C., NATO and the national Heads of State and Government formally approved the PfPC proposal.⁴

The establishment of the PfPC was motivated by the need to support former communist states that struggled to adapt to new European realities following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The PfPC was designed to serve as a flexible framework for cooperation, connecting professionals and organizations from partner nations in Central and Eastern Europe with NATO allies and other Western nations. The PfPC's founders envisioned a "consortium of the willing," comprising multinational security professionals from civilian, governmental, and military organizations.⁵ These contributors would work towards the following goals⁶:

1. Foster academic and educational opportunities across the security community.
2. Encourage high standards for professional military education.
3. Promote effective education through professional methods and advanced technology.
4. Expand dialogue, understanding, and cooperation through security-related research.
5. Explore complementary relationships across diverse institutions.

The founders of the PfPC believed that these efforts would cultivate a robust security community, which, in turn, would help address the security challenges faced by emerging democracies. This approach recognized that long-term security and stability require a "mental transformation." Therefore, one goal of the PfPC was to assist these nations in moving away from the hierarchical, compartmentalized, and authoritarian decision-making processes characteristic of Soviet legacy systems. In their place, the PfPC aimed to cultivate a community of na-

12, 1998," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 7, no. 3 (2008): 77-80, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.07>.

⁴ "An Alliance for the 21st Century," Washington Summit Communiqué issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. on 24th April 1999, https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/nato/hq/official_texts_27440.htm.

⁵ U.S. Joint State/Defense Action Message (1998), 2-3.

⁶ As quoted in the PfPC Letter of Commitment signed by eight senior leaders of Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Poland, Sweden, the Swiss Confederation, and the United States of America on 14 June 2024.

tional security professionals capable of strategic and critical thinking, collaborating across government agencies and national borders, and embracing transparency and democratic principles.⁷

The PfPC was tasked with fostering this mental transformation across societal sectors – what we now might describe as a Whole of Society approach. This required the PfPC to engage a diverse range of organizations, including “private foundations, ‘think tanks,’ governmental and non-governmental agencies.”⁸ By opening the PfPC for participation by these organizations, its founders also sought to strengthen civilian expertise in defense and security matters. NATO allies and other Western nations had observed a persistent lack of enduring civilian expertise in defense matters within former communist states, despite years of foreign assistance.⁹ This was problematic. It led to high turnover rates among civilian political leadership in defense establishments, making it difficult for those personnel to establish lasting relationships with NATO allies and other Western nations – and even to build stable relationships within their own governments. As a result, it proved difficult to engage in constructive dialogues on defense and security matters with these nations, and their efforts to develop coherent defense policies often stalled. Additionally, the lack of civilian expertise posed a threat to democratic control of the armed forces. With limited civilian understanding of defense and security, there was a risk that militaries might operate without adequate civilian oversight, undermining democratic principles and potentially leading to instability.¹⁰

NATO allies and other Western nations also viewed the PfPC as a means to strengthen relationships across the Euro-Atlantic, particularly by fostering cooperation among defense education and security studies institutions. These connections were intended to promote a shared commitment to democratic principles and contribute to regional stability. For example, by creating low-risk opportunities for knowledge exchange and mutual understanding, the PfPC could help prevent misperceptions, de-escalate tensions, and deter conflict. A noteworthy example of this was the small but meaningful role the PfPC played in facilitating dialogue during the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, one of the few nonviolent transitions of power in the South Caucasus in recent history.¹¹

⁷ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “Secretary-General’s Opening Speech” at the PfPC’s 10th anniversary conference at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, 18 June 2008, as cited in Walter L. Christman, “The PfP Consortium ‘Community of Experts’ Approach to International Security Cooperation,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 7, no. 3 (2008): 15-29, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.02>, 15.

⁸ U.S. Joint State/Defense Action Message (1998), 2.

⁹ Christman, “The PfP Consortium ‘Community of Experts’ Approach.”

¹⁰ Christman, “The PfP Consortium ‘Community of Experts’ Approach.”

¹¹ Frederic Labarre, “Whence and Whither the PfP Consortium?” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 7, no. 3 (2008): 70-74, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.06>, 71-72.

Evolution of the PfPC (1999–2024)

Throughout its history, the vision and underlying theory of the PfPC have remained consistent, even as its objectives and lines of effort have evolved.

Initially, circa 1999–2004, the PfPC focused on establishing a network of defense academies and security studies institutes across the Euro-Atlantic region, with particular emphasis on supporting former Soviet states. Efforts were aimed at bringing together civilian and military representatives from diverse backgrounds to engage in dialogue and knowledge sharing. PfPC contributors established numerous working groups, projects, and boards dedicated to addressing security issues and enhancing security training and education.¹² The PfPC demonstrated a commitment to grassroots development, encouraging individual contributors to play a central role in shaping its agenda and activities.¹³

As the security environment matured, circa 2004–2008, and with the accession of several partner nations to NATO,¹⁴ the PfPC sought greater accountability for its activities. Driven by donor expectations and the desire to demonstrate impact, the PfPC shifted its focus from general network building to a more project-oriented approach. This shift involved concentrating on smaller, more purposeful tasks with measurable results, such as developing generic “reference curricula” for partners’ Professional Military Education (PME) programs and investing in Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL) to expand access to educational resources.¹⁵ The PfPC also launched the Defense Education Enhancement Program (DEEP) in 2006.¹⁶ Through this program, subject-matter experts provide direct support to defense education institutions, such as by conducting on-site faculty development workshops and assisting those institutions in developing modern PME curricula, often using the PfPC-developed reference curricula as a foundation.¹⁷

From about 2008 to 2019, NATO’s growing global importance and greater emphasis on partnerships drove a shift in both regional and topical goals. As more European partners experienced increasing prosperity, greater connectivity to the West, and more liberal governance structures, and as three additional

¹² Christman, “The PfP Consortium ‘Community of Experts’ Approach.”

¹³ Peter Foot, “Taking Stock of the Consortium,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 2, no. 2 (2003): 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.02.2.01>.

¹⁴ Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined NATO on 29 March 2004.

¹⁵ Raphael Perl, ed., *Annual Report 2018. PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes* (Vienna: PfP Consortium and Austrian National Defence Academy, 2019), <https://www.pfp-consortium.org/media/278/download>.

¹⁶ DEEP continues today and is co-managed by PfPC and NATO International Staff.

¹⁷ Christman, “The PfP Consortium ‘Community of Experts’ Approach”; John Berry, “Defense Education Enhancement Program: The Consortium Perspective,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 11, no. 4 (2012): 27–33, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.11.4.03>.

countries joined NATO,¹⁸ the PfPC's geographic scope expanded. New partners included nations in the Southern Caucasus, Central Asia, and North Africa. The PfPC also increased its efforts to promote defense institution building through educational enhancement and multinational research, with a growing focus on addressing emerging security challenges such as hybrid warfare, cybersecurity, and countering violent extremism.¹⁹

More recently, circa 2019-2024, the PfPC has intensified its focus on demonstrating operational effectiveness and aligning its activities more closely with the strategic priorities of its governance stakeholders. This has been driven by several factors, including increased scrutiny of funding, the desire to remain a valuable tool for security sector partnerships, and the evolving security context. The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated the PfPC's evolution, compelling it to develop more flexible approaches to accomplish its activities.²⁰

The evolution of the PfPC demonstrates its capacity to adapt to shifting security environments and priorities. Since its establishment in 1999, the Consortium has evolved from focusing on network building to becoming a robust community of practice with a broader geographic scope. It now pursues impactful projects, mentors partner institutions, and leverages innovation to address emerging security challenges. Despite these advancements, the PfPC has remained firmly committed to its core mission of fostering security through cooperation. This mission is grounded in cultivating robust networks of diverse security professionals, enhancing educational opportunities, and supporting the development of resilient institutions. These enduring priorities continue to guide its efforts in an evolving global landscape.

For more details on the foundations and evolution of PfPC, review the publications summarized in Table 1.

PfPC's Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

The year 2024 marked the PfPC's 25th anniversary. This achievement was recognized by the Bulgarian government in a celebration on April 4, 2024, in Sofia. Military education leaders also honored the PfPC during the annual NATO Conference of Commandants on May 7, 2024, in Washington, D.C. Former Bulgarian Minister of Defense Todor Tagarev offered formal comments, and former U.S. Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen added written remarks, which included the following lines²¹:

¹⁸ From 2008-2019 three nations joined NATO: Albania and Croatia in 2009, and Montenegro in 2017.

¹⁹ Christman, "The PfP Consortium 'Community of Experts' Approach"; and Perl, ed., *Annual Report 2018*.

²⁰ Annual reports of the PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes for 2019 and 2020, edited by Dr. Raphael Perl.

²¹ Open letter from William S. Cohen to the PfPC, May 2024.

Table 1. Annotated bibliography of publications focused on the history of the PfPC.

Authors	Article Summary
Costigan et al. (2008)	History of the PfPC, contextualized within the broader framework of post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic security. Highlights the PfPC's role in bringing together researchers, military staff, and diplomats to harmonize thinking on security policy and doctrine.
Christman (2008)	Historical summary of the PfPC (1998–2008), tracing its origins in the post-Cold War era to its role in supporting NATO's expanding global partnerships by 2008. Describes the PfPC's approach to building a community of practice, characterized by working groups, study groups, and conferences that foster dialogue, enable knowledge creation, and support various education and training initiatives.
Labarre (2008)	Retrospective analysis of the PfPC (1998–2008), highlighting the successes of various initiatives as well as areas for improvement, such as the need to focus on emerging security challenges. Concludes with a call for continued commitment to the PfPC.
Berry (2012)	The history and structure of DEEP, including its origins in the NATO Partnership Action Plan on Defense Institution Building (PAP-DIB), its main components, and its management by the PfPC and NATO. The article also discusses the tangible impact DEEP has had on defense education reforms in partner countries.
Keagle (2012)	Explores how cooperation via security and defense education initiatives (such as DEEP) can transform mindsets, in turn promoting values such as democracy and good governance, contributing to security sector reforms, and ultimately supporting lasting security and peace (revised and updated version of Keagle and Petros, 2010).
Perl & Mueller (2015)	Reviews the founding, charter, and evolution of the PfPC. Discusses the initial proposal by the U.S. and German defense ministers to establish the PfPC, the selection of the George C. Marshall Center as its host organization, the first PfPC conference, and the early statements on the PfPC's lines of effort, principles, and administration.

de Dardel (2018) ²²	Discusses the history of the PfPC within the broader context of the NATO Partnership for Peace program while noting the PfPC’s distinct purpose and institutional identity.
Stolberg et al. (2018) ²³	Summary and analysis report on DEEP, covering its origins, impact on partner nations, and current (as of 2018) activities and co-management structure involving the PfPC and NATO International Staff. Includes a positive assessment of DEEP’s effectiveness in modernizing PME in partner countries and describes the factors that support such outcomes: selecting appropriate subject-matter experts, securing strong leadership support, and developing effective curricula and faculty development programs.

As NATO and its partners promote equipment interoperability on the battlefield to allow for more seamless multinational operations, PfPC supports intellectual interoperability efforts to build enduring institutions and lasting regional stability. The academic and intellectual exchange of ideas on best practices, military strategies, and cutting-edge research will allow our countries and institutions to continue to grow closer and more interconnected. With war raging in Europe—as it was when we formed PfPC in 1999—I know that this organization will continue to foster close connections between military and academic leaders and help nurture the next generation of leaders.

The most notable anniversary celebration took place at the NATO headquarters in Brussels on June 14, 2024. Senior representatives from the PfPC’s (then) eight governance stakeholder nations formally affirmed their enduring commitment to the PfPC and its principles. In a signed letter, these leaders emphasized a “shared vision of enduring Euro-Atlantic partnerships” via intellectual interoperability among allied and partner nations, the promotion of modern standards for PME, and the pursuit of research and emerging security concepts through an active network, as well as channels for dialogue and informal diplomacy across “defense educators and researchers, policymakers, and security practitioners from defense academies, security institutes, government agencies, universities, and nongovernmental organizations.”²⁴

²² Jean-Jacques de Dardel, “PfP, EAPC, and the PfP Consortium: Key Elements of the Euro-Atlantic Security Community,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 7, no. 3 (2008): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.01>.

²³ Alan G. Stolberg, Stuart Johnson, Laura Kupe, *Building Partner-Nation Capacity Through the Defense Education Enhancement Program* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE286.html>.

²⁴ See “Letter of Commitment” in the appendix of this article. The letter was signed by Dr. Arnold Kammel, Secretary General, Austria; Atanas Zapryanov, Minister of De-

PfPC Impacts

Over its 25-year history, the PfPC has been lauded by government leaders and scholarly practitioners. For example, at its tenth-anniversary celebration, (then) NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer called the PfPC “the flagship of Defense Institution Building,”²⁵ and in their 2015 chapter, Raphael Perl and Enrico Mueller asserted that the PfPC has “proven to be of immense value in facilitating the original vision behind the founders of the PfP Consortium: strengthening democracies through knowledge.”²⁶

However, despite this positive assessment, the PfPC has struggled to objectively document its impact. This should not be regarded as a lack of performance or carelessness on the part of Consortium collaborators. Rather, the structure and purpose of the PfPC make its impacts nearly impossible to quantify.

The PfPC is organized as a “consortium of the willing,” operating through semi-autonomous working groups with diverse participants and objectives. While this structure fosters bottom-up engagement, it also complicates the process of attributing specific outcomes to the Consortium as a whole. Additionally, PfPC applies instruments of soft power, such as education and relationship-building, in the pursuit of long-term goals, such as enhanced security and democratic governance, all within a complex and dynamic geopolitical environment. This creates a signal-to-noise challenge in terms of attributing change to specific PfPC interventions. Finally, many of the benefits that the PfPC aims to promote, such as increased trust between nations, are inherently difficult to quantify.

However, as acknowledged in the most recent update of the 2024 Terms of Reference, “the Consortium has a responsibility to evaluate its impact and to strive for continuous improvement.”²⁷ Demonstrating impact is key to maintaining the financial and political support of PfPC stakeholders, and by evaluating its efforts, the PfPC can make better-informed decisions.

fence, Bulgaria; Bill Blair, Minister of National Defence, Canada; Boris Pistorius, Federal Minister of Defence, Germany; Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, Minister of National Defence, Poland; Pål Jonson, Minister of Defence, Sweden; Pålvi Pulli, Deputy State Secretary for Security Policy, Switzerland; and Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense, United States of America. Several months after these eight leaders signed the letter, Romania formally joined the PfPC’s governance stakeholders. In a letter signed by Angel Tîlvăr, Minister of National Defence of Romania, dated July 2024, he acknowledges that joining the PfPC leadership carries a commitment “to work towards the ideals outlined in the PfP Consortium Reaffirmation Letter of Intent,” and that “our Ministry similarly affirms our enduring commitment to those outcomes.”

²⁵ As cited in Christman, “The PfP Consortium ‘Community of Experts’ Approach to International Security Cooperation,” 15.

²⁶ Raphael Perl and Enrico Mueller, “Partnership for Peace Consortium: An Innovative Approach to Defense Education and Institution Building,” in *NATO: From Regional to Global Security Provider*, ed. Yonah Alexander and Richard Prosen (Lexington Books, 2015), 209-219, quote on p. 213.

²⁷ PfPC Terms of Reference. Internal governance document, dated 10 July 2024.

Theory of Change

As one step toward better documenting the impacts of the PfPC, we propose to examine the Consortium through a *Theory of Change* methodology.

Theory of Change is an analytical approach for articulating how immediate activities are expected to produce downstream outcomes, particularly in complex sociological systems. Typically, this approach includes two main aspects: a logical diagram and critical reflection. The logical aspect involves mapping a sequence of events, a chain of *inputs* (direct actions) to *outputs* (direct results) to *outcomes* (short- and medium-term results) to *impacts* (long-term systemic change). Once the mapping is complete, it should be examined through a collaborative critical reflection process to interrogate assumptions and foster shared understanding.²⁸ The Theory of Change framework helps systematically evaluate the historical impacts of the PfPC and assess whether its activities logically align with its stated goals.

To begin the analysis, we first consider the PfPC's *raison d'être*, that is, the ultimate ends its efforts are meant to support. In the language of the Theory of Change, these are the desired *impacts*. Broadly, all PfPC efforts are intended to contribute to improved regional stability, address transnational security challenges, and promote democratic principles and the rules-based international order. The Consortium pursues this mission via three areas of focus: Intellectual Interoperability, Security Sector Cooperation, and Institutional Capacity Building.²⁹ Each of these areas is described in more detail below, along with an analysis of how those efforts may be linked to the desired impacts.

PfPC Focus Area 1: Intellectual Interoperability

PfPC's primary focus area is Intellectual Interoperability. The desired outcome is to foster a diverse, multinational community that shares a common understanding, uses compatible approaches, and adheres to common values related to security and defense. These factors, in turn, promote regional stability, enable more effective multinational security cooperation, and ultimately lead to a more secure and stable world.

Problem Statement

Why would a lack of intellectual interoperability be problematic? The PfPC was founded on the recognition that post-Cold War security challenges required a "mental transformation" to stabilize post-Soviet nations and support their integration with the West (as described in the Background section). Intellectual interoperability remains a critical element in today's evolving security landscape. Multinational cooperation is necessary to address transnational challenges, requiring an "intellectual consensus" among defense and security professionals. Continuous efforts are needed to resolve differing national perspectives and

²⁸ For example, see Isabel Vogel, *Review of the Use of 'Theory of Change' in International Development* (London: UK Department for International Development, 2012).

²⁹ PfPC Terms of Reference, dated 10 July 2024.

overcome institutional and cultural barriers to effective cooperation on topics such as confronting disinformation, regulating emerging technologies, and responding to hybrid threats. These modern challenges demand Whole of Society responses and transnational cooperation. Without intellectual interoperability, fragmented or incompatible approaches among allies, partners, or even sectors within a single nation could hinder effective solutions.

Intervention Logic

The PfPC works towards intellectual interoperability through the following activities:

Network Building and Institutional Cooperation: Fundamentally, PfPC's approach cultivates and sustains a network of defense educators, researchers, policymakers, and security practitioners. In 2024, the PfPC held over 30 working group meetings (each lasting 3-5 days), more than 10 collaborative reference curriculum writing workshops (each approximately 3-5 days in person), supporting seven different projects that span roughly two years each. Additionally, over 400 in-person and online DEEP engagements were executed in conjunction with NATO. In 2024, experts from 51 different nations, diplomatically recognized regions, and international organizations participated in PfPC meetings.³⁰ Another concrete example is the DEEP Clearing House, where in 2024, DEEP practitioners from 25 nations and NATO came together to share "a set of common references, doctrines, and approaches to problem solving" for developing intellectual interoperability through their annual PME interventions.³¹

Collaborative Projects and Seminars: The PfPC brings together experts from various countries and disciplines through multinational initiatives to explore a wide range of security issues. These initiatives may include weeklong seminars or collaborative, multiyear projects. As an example, the PfPC Women, Peace, and Security in PME working group recently held an active-learning seminar and is collectively developing a Concept Note for use across defense academies.³²

Educational Engagements: The PfPC organizes educational programs, including workshops and DEEP professional development seminars, to enhance the

³⁰ Own data, collected from the PfPC records for 2024. The 52 participating nations included: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malawi, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vatican City as well as NATO and the United Nations.

³¹ Jean d'Andurain and Alan G. Stolberg, "Defense Education Enhancement Program: The NATO Functional Clearing-House on Defense Education," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 11, no. 4 (2012): 53-58, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.11.4.06>.

³² Grazia Scoppio and Björn Lagerlöf, "The First Partnership for Peace Consortium Workshop on Women, Peace and Security in Professional Military Education: Reflections, Considerations, and the Way Ahead," *Canadian Military Journal* 24, no. 1 (2024): 57-66, <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/cmj-article-en-page57.html>.

knowledge and skills of defense educators, researchers, policymakers, and security practitioners. These programs provide opportunities for participants to engage with experts, share best practices, and deepen their understanding of key security concepts.

Sharing Advice: Through its network of experts, the PfPC provides policy advice to governments and international organizations. This is often achieved through publications that summarize advice or translate project findings into recommendations. The PfPC produces a wealth of policy papers, research reports, and academic publications, which serve as valuable resources for educating security professionals and informing policy decisions. PfPC also publishes *Connections*, a quarterly peer-reviewed journal, and participates in scholarly and governmental events that enable information dissemination. For example, the PfPC's Emerging Security Challenges working group holds a couple of workshops each year and disseminates its findings via publications, media appearances, formal briefings, and participation in public events. In 2024, for instance, the group briefed the NATO Science and Technology Organization (STO) on Cognitive Warfare. It also participated in the NATO Science for Peace and Security-sponsored workshop on hybrid threats and the conference on Responsible use of AI in the Military (REAM), among many others.³³

Analysis

The PfPC's approach to building intellectual interoperability is based on several rational hypotheses, as represented by the linkage points between steps in the Theory of Change model. For example, the PfPC asserts that intellectual interoperability begins with open dialogue and collaborative engagement on security challenges, which is supported by the creation of durable professional networks through projects such as the development of reference curricula. Education is also central to this approach, with investments in future security leaders and the development of personnel at defense institutions ensuring sustained impact. The dissemination of insights, such as through briefings and policy advice, helps bridge the gap between small-group discussions and real-world applications. Overall, these efforts aim to establish shared perspectives, promote mutual understanding, build trust, and foster enduring communities of multinational experts equipped with the ideas, values, and organizational tools (e.g., policies, curricula, capable defense academy faculty) necessary to support global security and stability.

³³ For example, the Emerging Security Challenges group published many articles and reports in 2024, such as Jean-Marc Rickli, Federico Mantellassi, and Quentin Ladetto, "What, Why and When? A Review of the Key Issues in the Development and Deployment of Military Human-Machine Teams," *Tailored Studies*, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, February 7, 2024, <https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/what-why-and-when-review-key-issues-development-and-deployment-military-human-machine>.

PfPC Focus Area 2: Security Sector Cooperation

PfPC's second focus area is Security Sector Cooperation. While this term refers to a broad range of activities, the PfPC's focus is more narrowly defined, concentrating on efforts aimed at creating opportunities for honest dialogue, establishing a multinational community of practice, and fostering channels for informal (Track II) diplomacy across national borders and diverse sectors.

Problem Statement

Why would a lack of security sector cooperation be problematic? The need for Security Sector Cooperation, as narrowly defined by the PfPC, arises from the reality that contemporary security challenges transcend national borders and require collaborative, multinational solutions. Traditional approaches to security, often grounded in state-centric perspectives and formal diplomatic channels, prove inadequate in addressing the complex and interconnected nature of modern threats. The PfPC posits that by creating opportunities for safe, open dialogue, diverse professionals will have more opportunities to explore difficult issues, build trust, and become more open to addressing transnational challenges together.

Intervention Logic

The PfPC works towards Security Sector Cooperation through the following activities:

Creating Spaces for Informal Dialogue at Conferences and Workshops: PfPC events provide opportunities for idea exchange, which can directly support security sector cooperation. For example, in 2024, the Security Sector Reform working group brought together sitting parliamentarians from six nations to discuss complex topics, such as appropriate responses for confronting disinformation and the regulation of artificial intelligence. In addition to the formal program, this event (like other PfPC activities) facilitated informal dialogue through longer breaks between sessions, group meals, cultural excursions, and more. Beyond the seminar discussions, parliamentarians participated in an excursion to NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), where they had the chance to engage informally in small groups while learning more about NATO's Partnership Directorate.³⁴

Bringing Together Diverse Participants: The PfPC strives to create a Whole of Society mix of participants in its meetings, ensuring a diverse multinational and cross-sectoral representation. This diversity in representation encourages participants to interact with viewpoints they might not typically encounter, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of complex security issues. "As one small but pertinent example of the Consortium's early uniqueness, nowhere else

³⁴ Lawmakers from Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Ukraine engaged in discussions on May 13-17, 2024, in Brussels. See "PfPC and DCAF host Parliamentarians for a Security Sector Governance and Oversight Roundtable," *Marshall Center News*, May 17, 2024, www.marshallcenter.org/en/news-archive/pfpc-and-dcaf-host-parliamentarians-security-sector-governance-and-oversight-roundtable.

could Azeris and Armenians meet in a strictly Chatham House-governed, non-governmental atmosphere that encouraged mutual cooperation and respect.”³⁵

Expeditionary Engagements: The PfPC prioritizes in-person meetings, which are frequently held at partner institutions across the Euro-Atlantic region. The PfPC sponsors travel for partners and key experts to attend these meetings, thereby expanding the network of engaged individuals and institutions and providing opportunities to learn about different cultures and contexts. For example, in 2024, the Regional Stability in South East Europe working group organized a workshop on international trust-building in Pristina, Kosovo. In addition to the formal program, which featured expert panels and discussions on topics such as political dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, the program included tours of key locations near Pristina, including North Mitrovica, a hotspot of inter-ethnic tension.³⁶ Such contextualized experiences foster greater understanding (e.g., through the concept of embodied cognition).

Analysis

The PfPC’s approach to security sector cooperation is built on a foundational belief that creating opportunities for informal and safe dialogue fosters engagement, trust-building, a willingness to collaborate, and the development of shared perspectives, particularly across national and sectoral divides. The PfPC brings together a Whole of Society mix of participants with diverse backgrounds, exposing them to new viewpoints and multifaceted approaches, under the hypothesis that single perspectives are typically insufficient for addressing modern transnational issues. The PfPC’s preference for in-person and on-site engagements is also driven by the underlying belief that they nurture positive personal relationships and enduring connections, which help individuals develop understanding and empathy for others’ contexts and cultures, thereby improving the quality and motivation of security cooperation.

PfPC Focus Area 3: Institutional Capacity Building

The third focus area of the PfPC is Institutional Capacity Building.³⁷ Similar to the second focus area, the PfPC narrowly scopes its work to defense and security

³⁵ Sean Costigan, Ernst Felberbauer, and Peter Foot, “The Challenges of Being Ten: Reflections on the Uniqueness of the PFP Consortium,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 7, no. 3 (2008): 52-60, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.07.3.04>.

³⁶ The workshop “Building Trust under Difficult Conditions – Kosovo/Serbia and the View of the Neighbours” took place on September 19-22, 2024. See “RSSEE Group Discusses Serbia-Kosovo Relations in Pristina & Mitrovica,” *PfPC News*, accessed January 10, 2025, <https://www.pfp-consortium.org/news/rssee-group-discusses-serbia-kosovo-relations-pristina-mitrovica>.

³⁷ In U.S. defense terminology, Institutional Capacity Building refers to any legal means “to enhance the capacity of such foreign country to exercise responsible civilian control of the national security forces of such foreign country,” including “articles, training, defense services, supplies (including consumables), and small-scale construction.” See Public Law 114-328, “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017,”

educational capacity initiatives. These PfPC initiatives aim to strengthen the capabilities of defense academies, security studies institutes, and similar organizations.

Problem Statement

Why is it desirable to work with partner defense academies and security studies institutes to modernize their PME capabilities? The problem lies in the fact that some PME providers continue to rely on outdated teaching methods, such as rote memorization, which fosters parochial, superficial thinking and insular approaches. This deficiency is rooted in a legacy of hierarchical, centralized decision-making structures and a lack of exposure to contemporary, learner-centric pedagogical practices. To support “mental transformation,” these institutions need to adopt modern methods (e.g., constructivist teaching techniques) that develop individuals capable of thinking globally, critically, and collaboratively,³⁸ as well as incorporate modern learning technologies that prepare individuals for complex security threats, such as cyberwarfare.³⁹ Upgrading technology also necessitates a cultural shift within organizations towards collaboration, information sharing, and decentralized learning – all essential elements of modern, effective defense institutions.⁴⁰

Intervention Logic

The PfPC works towards PME Institutional Capacity Building through the following activities:

DEEP: Co-sponsored with NATO, DEEP aims to professionalize the armed forces of developing nations by providing targeted support for their military education systems. This involves curriculum development, faculty training, and the adoption of modern teaching methodologies. The goal is to align partner institutions with modern PME standards and values, fostering interoperability and enhancing their contributions to multinational security efforts. DEEP programs are meticulously tailored to individual partner requirements, addressing specific needs and promoting long-term self-sufficiency. Established nearly 20 years ago, DEEP’s impact is already felt in countries such as Armenia, Moldova, Tunisia, and Ukraine.⁴¹

§ 333. Foreign security forces: authority to build capacity. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2943/text>.

³⁸ James M. Keagle, “A Special Relationship: US and NATO Engagement with the Partnership for Peace to Build Partner Capacity Through Education,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 11, no. 4 (2012): 59-74, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.11.4.07>.

³⁹ James M. Keagle and Tiffany G. Petros, “Building Partner Capacity Through Education: NATO Engagement with the Partnership for Peace,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 10, no. 1 (2010): 46-63, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.10.1.03>.

⁴⁰ Keagle, “A Special Relationship: US and NATO Engagement with the Partnership for Peace to Build Partner Capacity Through Education.”

⁴¹ Jim Barrett, “Education for Reform: New Students, New Methods, New Assessments,” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 11, no. 4 (2012): 34-42, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.11.4.04>.

Reference Curricula Development: This core aspect of PfPC activities directly supports the modernization and professionalization of defense and security education. Through workshops, mentoring programs, and the development of reference curricula, the PfPC equips partner institutions with the tools and expertise to design and deliver high-quality training programs. This is exemplified by the development of reference curricula on topics such as hybrid threats, leadership and ethics, and non-commissioned officer professional military education.⁴²

Applied Projects: The PfPC also supports applied projects, some realized through DEEP, while projects take place in the PfPC working groups. For example, in the last several years, the Advanced Distributed Learning working group has invested in institutional development and promoting interoperability. This work has included hands-on evaluation of courseware later used in the Viking multinational exercise,⁴³ the issuance of an information paper that describes how military academies can begin using artificial intelligence for learning,⁴⁴ and the development of policies and technologies needed to improve e-learning courseware sharing across institutions.

Analysis

The PfPC's approach to the capacity building of defense and security educational institutions is based on a solid educational theory. For instance, the PfPC hypothesizes that outdated teaching methods, such as rote memorization (e.g., behaviorism), generally result in parochial thinking and superficial approaches to problem-solving, while modern, learner-centric approaches (e.g., constructivism) are more effective in fostering critical, global, and collaborative thinking.⁴⁵ The PfPC's support for modern learning technologies also emphasizes their important role in capacity building – enhancing not only learning experiences but also driving cultural shifts within hierarchical institutions. Therefore, the PfPC's various capacity-building activities are designed to support sustainable institutional reform, ensuring that partner institutions will produce well-educated personnel who can think critically and systematically, understand the international context, and possess the knowledge needed to collaborate across boundaries.

⁴² See <https://www.pfp-consortium.org/products/reference-curricula>.

⁴³ Raphael Perl, ed., *Annual Report 2019. Pfp Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes* (Vienna: Pfp Consortium and Austrian National Defence Academy, 2020), <https://www.pfp-consortium.org/media/361/download>.

⁴⁴ "How Does AI Support Military Education, Training, Exercises and Evaluation," *Information Paper*, Pfp Consortium ADL Working Group, <https://www.pfp-consortium.org/media/489/download>.

⁴⁵ For a review and comparison of learning paradigms, see Peggy A. Ertmer and Timothy J. Newby, "Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism: Comparing Critical Features from an Instructional Design Perspective," *Performance Improvement Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2013): 43-71, <https://doi.org/10.1002/piq.21143>. The article highlights that while behaviorist strategies, such as rote learning, can support lower-level thinking; more modern methods are better suited to higher-order cognitive development.

Theory of Change: Summary

By fostering intellectual interoperability, the PfPC enhances mutual understanding and trust among diverse stakeholders, facilitating more effective responses to transnational threats. Its efforts in security sector cooperation provide avenues for open dialogue, trust-building, and the cultivation of networks that span national and sectoral boundaries. Additionally, its institutional capacity-building initiatives better equip nations with the tools, curricula, and teaching techniques necessary to prepare future leaders for complex security challenges. See Table 2 for a summary of the abbreviated Theory of Change model discussed in this article.

Table 2. Summary of PfPC’s abbreviated Theory of Change model.

<i>Ultimately, the PfPC strives to increase regional stability, foster global security cooperation, and promote a peaceful, democratic, rules-based international order</i>			
Area	Intellectual Interoperability	Security Cooperation	Institutional Capacity Building
Problem Statement	Fragmented or incompatible approaches among allies and partners hinder effective responses to transnational security challenges. Intellectual interoperability is necessary to overcome cultural, institutional, and national barriers to cooperation.	Security challenges transcend borders, requiring trust and collaboration across sectors and nations. Without informal dialogue and diverse participation, stakeholders struggle to address complex transnational threats.	Outdated teaching methods, antiquated content, and limited learning technologies hinder the ability of defense academies to adequately prepare security professionals for complex, transnational challenges and cooperate with NATO allies.

Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain professional networks through workshops, DEEP activities, and working groups • Address security challenges via multinational seminars and initiatives • Enhance knowledge and skills through training and workshops • Influence stakeholders with publications, briefings, and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities that encourage informal exchanges at workshops and conferences (Track II diplomacy) • Ensure diverse participation from across nations, sectors, and perspectives • Host in-person meetings in varied locations to build relationships, create memorable and emotional experiences, and foster cultural understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernize curricula, develop faculty, and align PME with international standards via DEEP engagements • Develop and share modern curricula for critical topics such as military leadership and hybrid threats • Support applied projects that help modern institutions, such as helping military academies use e-learning and AI applications
Key Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over time, open dialogue fosters shared perspectives, trust, and common values • Professional networks endure beyond individual projects and strengthen long-term collaboration • Educational investments ensure sustainable cohesion and real-world application of shared values and approaches • Policy advice and project insights effectively influence key security stakeholders and institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe, informal dialog fosters openness, trust, and collaboration • Exposure to diverse perspectives enhances problem-solving on complex issues • Face-to-face interactions strengthen relationships and cultural empathy for long-term cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modern learning methods and technologies foster critical, collaborative thinking and institutional reform • Tailored capacity-building programs lead to sustainable improvements and interoperability • Strong institutions produce capable professionals who enhance stability and international security cooperation

Conclusion

This article traced the 25-year history of the PfPC, highlighting its contributions to international security and its recognition by defense ministers and NATO Secretaries General. The Consortium's work has been associated with significant milestones, and since its founding, 13 partners have joined NATO.

While the PfPC's past achievements are notable, ensuring its future relevance requires a more systematic evaluation of its impacts. As such, this article contributes to evaluating the PfPC using a Theory of Change model. However, further analysis is needed. To maximize its potential, the model should be refined and integrated into strategic planning, supported by more robust empirical evidence, and actively used in collaboration with PfPC stakeholders.

In addition to supporting the PfPC directly, such analyses offer valuable lessons for other international initiatives. In a world facing increasingly complex and interconnected security challenges, the PfPC's focus on intellectual interoperability, security sector cooperation, and institutional capacity building continues to provide a critical foundation for regional and global stability. Furthermore, the PfPC's efforts serve as a model for fostering stability across other regions and domains, revealing a pathway to security and stability through sustained collaboration, educational principles, and strategic action.

Disclaimer

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

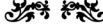
About the Authors

Sae Schatz, PhD, is Executive Director of the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. *E-mail:* sae.schatz@marshallcenter.org
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8122-6508>

LTC **Olaf Garlich** is Deputy Executive Director of the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. *E-mail:* olaf.garlich@marshallcenter.org

Scott Buchanan, PhD, is Director, Security Cooperation, Office of the Secretary of Defense, United States, E-mail: scott.c.buchanan.civ@mail.mil

Appendix: Letter of Commitment (2024)



The Federal Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Austria,
The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria,
The Department of National Defence of Canada,
The Federal Ministry of Defence for the Federal Republic of Germany,
The Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Poland,
The Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Sweden,
The Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport of the Swiss Confederation,
and
The Department of Defense of the United States of America
(hereinafter: Signatories)

The Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes (PfP Consortium) was established in 1999 in the spirit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace program to strengthen defense and security education through enhanced national and institutional cooperation.

In the past 25 years, the PfP Consortium has cultivated a trusted global network that fosters stability and enhances security, bringing together hundreds of institutions across the Euro-Atlantic region to support multinational initiatives in defense education, security sector cooperation, and capacity building. Today, the PfP Consortium has risen to the ambitions defined during the formative discussions held at the NATO and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council meetings that lead to the Consortium's creation:

1. Foster academic and educational opportunities across the security community
2. Encourage high standards for professional military education
3. Promote effective education through professional methods and advanced technology
4. Expand dialogue, understanding, and cooperation through security related research
5. Explore complementary relationships across diverse institutions

Despite these achievements, aspects of the contemporary security environment continue to degrade, and we face increasingly complex regional, global, and transnational issues. These challenges reinforce the need for continued cooperation among Allies and Partners as well as the reaffirmation of the ideals and initiatives of the PfP Consortium. The Signatories are united by a shared vision of enduring Euro-Atlantic partnerships, and in signing this Letter of Intent, recognize the persistent need for security cooperation across our defense academies, security studies institutes, and partner institutions, in order to:

Pursue intellectual interoperability among Allies and Partners by strengthening Partner defense and security institutions, enhancing cross-sector cooperation, and promoting modern standards for professional military education.

Advance multinational solutions to modern security challenges by operationalizing research and emerging security concepts through an active network of defense educators and researchers, policymakers, and security practitioners from defense academies, security institutes, government agencies, universities, and nongovernmental organizations.

Contribute to conflict prevention by nurturing enduring partnerships to expand dialogue, build resilient networks, and provide channels for informal diplomacy.

We affirm our enduring commitment to the PfP Consortium



for the
Federal Ministry of Defence
of the Republic of Austria

Dr. Arnold Kammel
Secretary General



for the
Ministry of Defence of the
Republic of Bulgaria

Atanas Zaprjanov
Minister of Defence



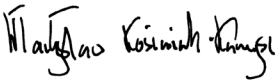
for the
Department of National
Defence of Canada

Bill Blair
Minister of National Defence



for the
Federal Ministry of Defence of the
Federal Republic of Germany

Boris Pistorius
Federal Minister of Defence



for the
Ministry of National Defence
of the Republic of Poland

Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz
Deputy Prime Minister and
Minister of National Defence



for the
Ministry of Defence of the
Kingdom of Sweden

Pål Jonson
Minister of Defence



for the
Federal Department of Defence,
Civil Protection and Sport of
the Swiss Confederation

Pálvi Pulli
Deputy State Secretary
for Security Policy



for the
Department of Defense of the
United States of America

Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense

Signed in Brussels on 14 June 2024

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