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TAKING STOCK - MOVING FORWARD: OPPORTUNITIES AND SHORTCOMINGS FROM THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE'S 'INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY' ACTIONS

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REPORT ON THE CCDP AND TODA PEACE INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD IN GENEVA ON 30-31 JANUARY 2025

Abstract

This report captures the key insights and debates from a two-day international conference on the Pact for the Future, convened by the CCDP and the Toda Peace Institute on 30–31 January 2025. The conference explored pressing questions, such as: What role can the Pact for the Future play in strengthening global peace and security? How can it address the growing challenges of multilateralism at a time when international cooperation seems increasingly fragile? What opportunities does it offer for advancing inclusive governance and conflict prevention? This report sheds light on the Pact for the Future's implications for peace and security and the opportunities it presents for more effective and inclusive global governance.

Introduction

On 30–31 January 2025, the CCDP and the Toda Peace Institute convened a two-day international conference that brought together leading researchers and practitioners to identify innovative approaches for global, regional, and national engagement on peace and security. The conference explored pressing questions, such as: What role can the Pact for the Future play in strengthening global peace and security? How can it address the growing challenges of multilateralism at a time when international cooperation seems increasingly fragile? What opportunities does it offer for advancing inclusive governance and conflict prevention? Through dynamic discussions, the conference aimed to bring together insights from cutting-edge analysis with initiatives for practical action, fostering dialogue on how to translate the commitments of the Pact for the Future into meaningful implementation.

The idea behind the Summit of the Future, proposed in 2021 in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, emerged from a recognition that multilateral systems had failed to respond effectively to global crises. UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged world leaders to come together to renew their commitment to multilateralism. Since then, however, the world has only grown more fragmented and conflictual. By the time the UN General Assembly convened for the Summit on 23 September 2024, the organization was facing one of its most challenging periods. Ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza had deepened global divisions, while many member states viewed the UN as falling short on its commitments to sustainable development, climate action, and financial reform.

Despite significant tensions, the Summit led to three potentially landmark agreements: the *Pact for the Future* (advancing the Secretary-General's *New Agenda for Peace*); a *Global Digital Compact*; and a *Declaration for Future Generations*.

This report captures the key insights and debates from the conference, shedding light on the *Pact for the Future's* implications for peace and security and the opportunities it presents for more effective and inclusive global governance.

Openings in the *Pact for the Future*

An analysis of the different versions of the *Pact for the Future* reveals the difficult negotiations behind its final form. Some elements disappeared entirely—such as a proposed Action on climate change and international peace and security, or any reference to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)—while other Actions were watered down. The result is an unclear roadmap, characterized by vague commitments and a reliance on voluntary actions. This outcome is not surprising, given the widespread recognition that both the global and regional multilateral architectures for promoting international peace and security have been in crisis for several years.

However, despite its limitations, the Pact contains several entry points for concrete action, particularly in the realm of international peace and security. It offers opportunities to push forward key commitments and introduce new strategies in areas where it remains vague or silent. These include:

- strengthening the prevention agenda by emphasizing early warning and proactive diplomacy,
- addressing the growing burden of global military spending and militarization,
- recognizing the climate crisis and conflict nexus and advocating for sustainable solutions,
- renewing momentum for arms control and disarmament, and
- advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda to ensure gender-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution

These issues will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

While a significant portion of the Pact consists of reaffirmations of existing commitments, this should not be dismissed. Some reaffirmations are particularly significant – for instance, the commitment to nuclear disarmament, which had not been formally reaffirmed in nearly 15 years. Similarly, the Pact's reiteration of the importance of humanitarian access provides a crucial reference point in ongoing conflicts such as Ukraine and Gaza. Additionally, some aspects of the Pact that do not explicitly fall under "peace and security" could still have profound implications for global stability. The *Declaration for Future Generations* could be interpreted through a peace and security lens, laying the groundwork for a longer-term vision of sustainable peace.

The success of the Pact's global governance goals and its peace and security provisions will depend on several key factors. Political commitment will be essential, as nations must prioritize multilateral cooperation over narrow national interests. Stronger institutional frameworks will be needed to ensure effective implementation, alongside adequate resource allocation, since the Pact remains silent on funding, leaving governments responsible for making necessary investments. Public support will also be critical, as civil society engagement is necessary to drive meaningful change, particularly in the face of state reluctance. Long-term success will depend on tackling global challenges such as climate change, migration, and deepening inequalities, while ensuring that policies remain adaptable to evolving security dynamics. In today's context these are huge challenges.

There was broad recognition that the current geopolitical environment is particularly unfavourable for advancing these objectives. As one speaker noted, *"In all my years of working on these issues, things have never seemed as dark as they do now."* The dynamic between UN Member States and the Secretary-General has become a game of political "ping pong," with each side deflecting responsibility for implementation. At present, the ball is back in the hands of Member States, who must now take ownership of the next steps.

Yet this is no time for despair. On the contrary, this moment should serve as a call to action. Now more than ever, it is imperative to redouble efforts to promote and implement a rules-based global order, capable of reducing and preventing violence, and restoring predictability and security in an increasingly volatile world.

Rethinking the “global” peace and disarmament architecture

The first panel focused on two commitments from the *Pact for the Future*: adapting peace operations to address new challenges and upholding disarmament obligations. The debate centred on whether UN peace operations could be made fit for purpose amid evolving security threats and geopolitical shifts. A key issue was strengthening compliance with the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), a landmark treaty that regulates global arms transfers. Although not explicitly mentioned in the Pact, the ATT’s objectives align closely with broader peace and security goals.

A central theme was the distinction between implementation and compliance: implementation involves adopting new domestic laws, while compliance is much more than that – it refers to the practical enforcement of treaty provisions. Strengthening ATT compliance is critical for effective treaty implementation, national and international security, and building confidence in the treaty’s ability to regulate arms transfers responsibly. Three key areas of ATT compliance were discussed: transparency in arms reporting, conducting risk assessments, notably to prevent transfers linked to human rights violations, and preventing arms diversion to unauthorized users.

Suggestions for improving compliance included expanding capacity-building initiatives, enhancing reporting mechanisms, and strengthening risk assessments. Interestingly, countries in the Global South were seen as more eager to comply with the ATT than some Global North states, challenging conventional assumptions.

The discussion also addressed the rise in global military spending, which has increased significantly over the past decade. This encompasses expenditures on arms, personnel, and defense research. Given current security threats, cuts to defense spending were deemed unrealistic. Instead, military budgets could be linked to broader policy objectives, such as climate action and social development.

Additional discussions and presentations highlighted the rapidly evolving global security environment. Today’s world is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, shifts in international alignments, and the impact of the Trump Doctrine on conflict dynamics and peacekeeping mandates. Additionally, conceptions of peace are evolving, with a shift from an emphasis on positive peace to a more limited focus on the mere absence of war.

While the *New Agenda for Peace* and the *Pact for the Future* reference peace operations, they offer little concrete guidance. Several proposals were suggested to modernize peace operations. These included establishing adaptable, context-specific partnerships, particularly to navigate Security Council deadlocks, and strengthening UN-regional partnerships, especially with the African Union. There was also recognition of the growing role of regional and bilateral security missions, alongside the integration of AI-driven data analysis into peacekeeping strategies. Additionally, it was suggested that the traditional principles of peacekeeping—consent, impartiality, and non-use of force—should be reevaluated, with greater emphasis on trust, legitimacy, adaptability, and local ownership. Despite persistent challenges, it was recognized that UN peace operations remain a critical tool for conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict stabilization.

A particularly engaging debate emerged on the risks of focusing on small, localized steps towards peace such as humanitarian aid to villages or temporary ceasefires. While these efforts provide immediate relief, there is concern that they may fail to scale up to broader peace processes. How can peacebuilders ensure that these micro-level interventions contribute to the necessary and larger systemic changes?

This tension underscores a broader challenge: balancing incremental, community-based peace initiatives with long-term strategic visions for sustainable peace. While localized trust-building is crucial, peace operations must also maintain a focus on structural transformation to avoid becoming trapped in short-term solutions.

Peacebuilding and sustainable peace

The next session focused on the theme of peacebuilding, starting with the question: “Can the UN peacebuilding architecture be made fit for purpose?” A participant responded with a confident “yes,” prompting laughter from the room. A key takeaway from this session was the need for more systematic engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which could help facilitate sustained, long-term peacebuilding support and funding. This engagement would also incentivize cooperative relationships between host countries and international organizations.

Discussions explored the current internal and external challenges the UN faces. The difficulties in UN political missions and mediation efforts are growing, particularly in complex conflicts such as those in Syria, Ukraine, Yemen, and Libya. Internally, the UN struggles with a blockage in the Security Council, where the involvement of the permanent members (P5) in military action limits political support for peace initiatives. This has led to a crisis of legitimacy, with accusations of double standards arising, particularly when comparing the contrasting approaches to conflicts like Ukraine versus Gaza. Trust in the UN has diminished, relegating the organization to a technical role rather than one with significant political influence in peace processes. Externally, the rise of state actors who are both participants in and mediators of conflicts complicates the neutrality required for successful mediation.

How can the Pact help overcome these challenges? First, reforming the UN Security Council and enhancing strategic partnerships between the Peacebuilding Commission and international organizations will be vital for a more effective and inclusive peacebuilding process. Strengthening the role of elected members in mediation could help bridge divides and create a new pathway for progress. Additionally, creatively utilizing the good offices of the UN Secretary-General—a tool particularly effective during the Cold War—could provide new opportunities for mediation, especially in a polarized global context. Finally, embracing multipolarity not as a negative but as an opportunity for a rebalancing of powers could unlock new potential for peace, moving beyond zero-sum approaches and fostering collaborative solutions to conflicts.

Other interventions focused on Action 18 of the Pact, regarding securing adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding for peacebuilding, especially through contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund. While current resources remain modest, the upcoming international financing conference, as well as collaboration with international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, will play a key role in aligning efforts to prevent and consolidate peace. Additionally, strengthening national prevention strategies—discussed further in the next section—and fostering collaboration among the UN, the private sector, and civil society will be essential for achieving long-term peace.

The discussion also examined peace measurement and accountability, stressing the need for universal standards. Many peacebuilding efforts fail due to a lack of legitimacy. While there is general agreement on the concept of localization and its role in enhancing legitimacy, its exact definition remains unclear. Erosion of trust often arises from disregarding local perspectives and needs. The importance of evidence-based approaches was emphasized, along with the need to carefully consider context and understand who holds power in the process.

Additionally, some conversations raised concern about the role of corporations in the security and peace agenda. Why do we accept the dominance of neoliberal ideologies promoted by these organizations as the solution to development? Are we sure that the policies they propose are fostering peace, especially when we know they also contribute significantly to growing inequality?

Beyond peacebuilding: Violence prevention and reduction

The next session focused on national prevention strategies, SDG 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The discussion highlighted why this moment represents a unique opportunity to promote national conflict and violence prevention strategies.

At the political level, there is now significant space for national prevention strategies. In discussions with member states at the UN in New York, there is noticeable enthusiasm for this agenda. This marks a major shift from previous years when even mentioning prevention was met with resistance due to fears of external intervention. Today, prevention is increasingly recognized as sovereignty-enhancing, as it allows national and local actors to set their own priorities rather than having solutions imposed from outside. Moreover, prevention is understood as a universal necessity. No society is immune to violence, and all nations must contribute to reducing risks. The approach is also expanding beyond armed conflict to include other forms of violence, acknowledging that different societies face diverse threats, but all remain vulnerable in some way.

A key argument for national prevention strategies is their ability to move beyond isolated projects. Standalone initiatives addressing a single cause often fail to create meaningful, long-term impact. By adopting a systemic approach, national prevention strategies can target multiple, interconnected root causes of violence. *"It's the interlinkages that make the impact."* From both a political and technical standpoint, this shift presents an important opportunity to make substantial progress in preventing conflict and instability.

However, several challenges hinder the implementation of national prevention strategies. First, there is a fundamental lack of clarity about what such strategies should entail. Without clear guidelines, any country could claim to have a prevention strategy, even if it simply consists of repressive measures, such as mass incarceration, which could do more harm than good. Second, financing remains a major obstacle. While there is broad consensus on the need for prevention, funding for such initiatives is often the first to be cut. Third, there is growing fatigue among national and local actors who feel that their existing prevention efforts are neither acknowledged nor supported. Instead of imposing yet another rigid framework, national prevention strategies should be seen as an opportunity to connect and integrate the frameworks that are already in place, building on existing initiatives rather than starting from scratch. Finally, there is the question of how to mobilize the UN to provide meaningful support for national prevention strategies, ensuring that its role is both constructive and responsive to local needs.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to maintain trust in the prevention agenda by demonstrating its universal relevance. Prevention should not be framed as a top-down directive but rather as a collaborative, context-driven effort. Equally important is the need to prevent further fragmentation of national strategies, ensuring that prevention remains a coordinated and cohesive effort rather than a collection of disconnected initiatives. The good news is that many countries already have a national prevention strategy; the focus should be on strengthening existing frameworks and sharing knowledge and experiences on good practices, rather than creating them from scratch.

Prevention strategies are also linked to the achievement of SDG 16. While Action 7 is the most explicit reference, SDG 16 is embedded throughout the document, particularly in Actions 8, 12, 13, and 18, which address violence, hate speech, and small arms and light weapons. However, bridging the UN's institutional pillars remains challenging, as seen in the ECOSOC-Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) relationship. Advancing implementation at national and local levels requires identifying strategic entry points within high-level UN processes – *"this is about finding the hooks."* Financing challenges further complicate progress, as shrinking Official Development Assistance (ODA), hesitant parliaments, and divided publics make scalable solutions difficult. Moving beyond zero-sum approaches is key to creating synergies across climate financing, development, and peacebuilding. A positive step is that the Pact reinforces the interdependence of peace and development, echoing the 2016 Sustaining Peace Resolutions and the 2015 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR): no sustainable development without peace, and no lasting peace without development.

Finally, small arms control and regulation remains a contested and fragile agenda, requiring constant advocacy to stay on the global agenda. While recent documents reaffirm commitments—drawing from the 2001 Programme of Action—they offer broad, unambitious language with little innovation. The Pact introduced progress on gender, public health, and peacekeeping intelligence, yet key gaps remain: limited synergies with other arms control instruments, unclear future priorities, and weak action on supply and demand dynamics. Attempts to dilute commitments and exclude ammunition discussions further highlight divisions. Despite declines in homicide rates in some regions, conflict-related deaths are rising, underscoring the need for stronger, more integrated action. Large gaps in available data also make it difficult to track patterns in small arms and violence.

Advancing the women, peace and security agenda

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda has led to significant policy commitments, but its implementation remains uneven. While there have been improvements in women's participation in peace processes, persistent challenges such as tokenism, lack of decision-making power, and limited funding hinder progress. The agenda often operates within existing patriarchal and militarized structures, reinforcing rather than transforming power dynamics. Additionally, intersectionality is frequently reduced to a checklist rather than a tool for understanding complex inequalities. The focus on inclusion often centres on adding women without critically examining which women are represented or questioning male dominance in these spaces.

Despite international recognition and legal frameworks addressing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, actual progress is inconsistent. The WPS framework, while emphasizing prevention and response, often relies on rigid gender binaries that fail to capture the full spectrum of vulnerabilities. The need for measurable indicators has sometimes led to the oversimplification of gendered experiences, making it difficult to address structural inequalities effectively. Additionally, the focus on sexual and gender-based violence often sidelines broader gendered dimensions of violence, such as economic exploitation, displacement, and political marginalization.

The WPS agenda emphasizes inclusion but often without interrogating its foundational assumptions. The approach tends to ask where women are, rather than questioning the structures that exclude them or the role of men in sustaining these systems. Peace operations and mediation efforts increasingly seek gender balance, yet they remain embedded in security-focused, state-centric models that limit transformative change. There remains resistance in some quarters to the inclusion of women in peace processes, resistance that is structurally motivated and rooted in hierarchical worldviews that justify exclusion. The *Pact for the Future* acknowledges setbacks and barriers to women's participation, but it lacks specificity on the nature of these obstacles and how women navigate them.

Moreover, intersectional perspectives are frequently diluted when translated into policy, as efforts to standardize and quantify inclusion risk obscuring deeper systemic critiques. An abolitionist perspective on peacekeeping raises fundamental questions about whether these structures can ever be reformed or if alternative approaches to global security are needed.

To move forward, there is a need to engage critically with the foundational assumptions of the WPS agenda. Addressing gender inequality in peace and security requires not just better representation but a shift in how peace itself is conceptualized – moving away from militarized and colonial frameworks toward more inclusive, justice-oriented approaches. This involves rethinking integration, questioning who is included and why, and ensuring that intersectionality remains a tool for uncovering systemic oppression rather than a bureaucratic category. Without such shifts, the WPS agenda risks reinforcing the very power structures it seeks to challenge.

Inequality, though significant, is mentioned only a few times in the Pact. There is a need for a deeper understanding of how patriarchy, capitalism, nationalism authoritarianism and structural inequalities interact to perpetuate conflict. Additionally, the care economy, which relies heavily on volunteer labour, has expanded significantly during the war but remains largely invisible. Despite its critical role in sustaining communities, such crucial work is often overlooked in discussions of conflict and peacebuilding.

In peace and military operations, the inclusion of women is often assumed to have a direct, positive impact, such as increasing trust and reducing sexual violence. However, this assumes a causal relationship between women's presence and outcomes, without fully understanding the complexities of how these changes occur. If we focus only on the presence of women, we risk reinforcing essentialist assumptions and stereotypes about gender roles in peacebuilding.

Unpacking the climate, conflict and peace nexus: Linkages and opportunities

> "*The Action addressing the challenges posed by climate and environmental impacts was removed from the Pact for the Future, which is disappointing – especially since the New Agenda for Peace introduced some forward-thinking ideas and strong language. But I'm a pragmatist at heart. Does it matter? Probably not, because climate and environmental concerns are everywhere in the peace and security chapter. They are in Action 13, which focuses on addressing root causes and building sustainable peace; in Action 18, which emphasizes national prevention strategies; and in Action 21, which is about adapting peace operations to new realities. And what are new realities if not those shaped by climate change?*"

This discussion acknowledged a significant shift from previous years when it was necessary to demonstrate the linkages between climate change, conflict, and peace. Today, this connection is widely recognized as a critical issue for international peace and security. However, in some regions —such as Haiti—climate change is still perceived as a secondary concern. Yet its effects, including agricultural decline and environmental degradation, contribute to social instability and facilitate recruitment by armed groups, particularly gangs.

Organizations like the WWF are increasingly recognizing that their environmental work can also serve as an entry point for peacebuilding. This emphasizes the need for a UN capable of bridging silos and enhancing partnerships, particularly with local actors, the private sector, and other stakeholders. Equipping local communities to address the livelihood challenges brought about by climate change has become a key focus, with progress made in integrating climate issues into peace and security efforts. Recognizing that climate vulnerability is highly unequal is also necessary to advance peace and security.

However, there remains a significant gap in funding and operationalizing climate-security connections. SDG 16, for example, highlights the need for integrated funding that combines environmental protection with peace efforts, but measuring the success of such initiatives remains a challenge. Although the Pact addresses both environmental and security issues, there is a missed opportunity to further integrate these elements in practice, particularly regarding rule of law and governance in environmental law.

Looking ahead, discussions focused on how to move beyond traditional frameworks, asking not just what is being done but how it is being done. The overlap between peacebuilding and climate action offers a potential pathway for more sustainable and impactful solutions. While climate funds are often seen as vertical and siloed, there is growing recognition of the importance of contextual analysis and understanding the impact of these programs on local communities. Ultimately, ensuring the link between climate progress and peacebuilding requires a shift in narrative, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these issues.

The way ahead

> *"Critics without practice is empty, but practice without critique is blind." I think that's why those of us on both practitioner and scholarly sides must listen carefully to each other to avoid being either blind or empty.*

The final session invited participants to reflect on the "top three" creative proposals they would promote. Are there cross-cutting initiatives that could enable concerted action across multiple Action items? Can we identify innovative collaborations and partnerships to break out of the current "crisis in multilateralism"? Are there alternative voices—both positive and negative—that we must acknowledge and engage with?

The lead-up to the *Pact for the Future* was defined by a strong emphasis on inclusion. The UN summit was filled with high school students, and impact coalitions representing thousands of civil society members engaged in the process – though many of their expectations were left unmet, as most of their proposals were not adopted by member states. Despite this, the language of inclusion is everywhere. However, discussions around inclusion often focus on underrepresented groups or civil society, while a major set of actors remains largely excluded from and unaccountable to multilateralism: the private sector, major polluting companies, and arms manufacturers, for example – entities that remain outside the system and largely indifferent to its mechanisms. If we are to build broader support for multilateral action, we must find narratives that engage even those who oppose it.

Beyond inclusion, we must embrace a deeper, more transformative principle: pluralism. Inclusion alone, without a mindful engagement with diverse perspectives, risks becoming a superficial exercise. Meaningful change requires us to move beyond rigid, linear approaches to peacebuilding and adopt more dynamic, context-sensitive theories of change. Traditional models like the donor logframe often fail to capture the complexities of conflict-affected environments. Instead, we need frameworks that account for nuance, adaptability, and interconnected systems.

Action 53 of the *Pact for the Future* represents an important shift by challenging the reliance on GDP as the primary measure of progress. GDP does not adequately capture rising inequality, exclusion, or environmental degradation. Much of the economic growth over the past few decades has been driven by the depletion of the Earth's natural capital. Growth based on depletion of one's capital, through for example the extraction of non-renewable resources, such as timber or oil, is neither real nor sustainable. This reality must be integrated into economic assessments. While this issue was not discussed in depth, Action 53 offers an opportunity to adopt a more holistic approach – from micro-level efficiency to macro-level sustainability.

To move forward, we must also reframe our approach to building international peace and security through the lens of a political economy analysis, understanding where political and economic power lie, and identifying where investments can have the greatest impact. This means not only committing to sustainable development but also mastering the language of value for money and cost-effectiveness, ensuring that resources are allocated to interventions that drive long-term, transformative change.

Another crucial takeaway from this conference is the need for new ways of thinking – such as storytelling and innovative frameworks like the P4P Playbook. The goal is not to arrive with a rigid toolkit but with a playbook that contextualizes action: *Who are you? Who else is on your team? What position do you occupy? What strategies can emerge from this positioning?* These are the kinds of questions we must ask. New metaphors and conceptual tools are essential if we are to address the complexities of our time.

Above all, we must remain attentive to the power structures at play, recognizing both the leverage we hold and the responsibility that comes with it. Only through this critical lens can we hope to reshape a world that not only aspires to peace but actively builds it in ways that are both inclusive and sustainable. Ultimately, the question is not simply what is to be done, but rather: *"What more am I to do? And how does what I am doing work?"*

THE TODA PEACE INSTITUTE

The Toda Peace Institute is an independent, nonpartisan institute committed to advancing a more just and peaceful world through policy-oriented peace research and practice. The Institute commissions evidence-based research, convenes multi-track and multi-disciplinary problem-solving workshops and seminars, and promotes dialogue across ethnic, cultural, religious and political divides. It catalyses practical, policy-oriented conversations between theoretical experts, practitioners, policymakers and civil society leaders in order to discern innovative and creative solutions to the major problems confronting the world in the twenty-first century (see www.toda.org for more information).

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