

confidence building is and can do. Most analysts, after all, continue to be influenced by the traditional, minimalist understanding of confidence building, a perspective that does not encourage the sorts of questions that helped to develop the more elaborate reconstruction of the confidence building phenomenon featured in *Confidence Building in the Arms Control Process: The Transformation View*.

It is this continuing failure to devote conceptually-oriented attention to the confidence building phenomenon that makes the discussion of the transformation view so important. Although the transformation view is offered as a serious alternative to minimalist accounts of confidence building, it has a value that extends beyond the simple articulation of a competing account. It explicitly raises a number of important questions that *any* account of confidence building should be able to answer.

A Closer Look at the Minimalist Perspective and Its Problems

Most analysts and policy makers familiar with confidence building would likely be comfortable describing it as the use of formal, cooperative measures designed to improve information, increase understanding, and reduce uncertainty about the military forces and activities of fellow participating states.⁹ Some would also include military intentions in this characterization.

This very broad definition captures the basic elements present in most discussions of confidence building, views consistent with the minimalist perspective. As was emphasized earlier, this perspective recognizes little in the way of clear causal connections between the use of confidence building agreements and any deeper, underlying associated process of transformation in security relations. Instead, "confidence building" is treated for all intents and purposes as an approximate synonym for *implementing* a collection of CBMs (or simply the CBMs themselves). And implementing these measures is associated with a general but unexplored expectation that the adoption of CBMs will reduce misperception as well as perhaps

clarify intentions, and thus improve a security relationship. This is presumed to occur because participating states will have more (and more reliable) information about each others' military capabilities and activities.

At the risk of oversimplifying the basic claims of conventional (minimalist) confidence building thinking, it must be understood that more information about — and greater exposure to — the military forces of dangerous neighbours will not necessarily improve security relations as conventional thinking implies. Indeed, relations may worsen as added information feeds existing misperceptions and fears, particularly if normal weapons acquisition cycles yield forces of increased military capability and ambiguous character. Even a modest conception of the confidence building process should acknowledge this and grant that more must be going on than simply the acquisition of additional information. Some conventional minimalist treatments come closer to the truth when they focus on the willingness of participating states to *permit* the acquisition of information — implying some form of basic change in attitude — but this line of inquiry usually goes no further. This important point speaks to the absence of much clear thought in conventional thinking about the causal nature of confidence building. In short, how in fact *does* confidence building, even if it is thought to be nothing more than the use of information-oriented CBMs, improve security relations? Conventional confidence building thinking is largely silent on this question.

Decades of Cold War experience with the progressively more refined acquisition of information via National Technical Means (NTM) would suggest that access to more detailed information *by itself* can easily produce the opposite of confidence building. The enhanced access to information made possible by ever-more-sophisticated NTM, after all, did little to disabuse superpower decision makers and analysts of exaggerated assessments in the strategic nuclear and conventional realm during the Cold War.