

2. Ten Lessons from the Sinai Experience for Arms Control Verification and Risk Management

The success of the verification procedures in the Sinai offer some important lessons regarding the potential contribution of third-party-assisted multimethod verification to regional conflict management. As these lessons indicate, verification served a number of functions (i.e., early warning detection, deterrence and confidence-building) the prominence of which varied with time and context.

Lesson No. 1: Risk management perspective:

The verification process assists the parties initially in managing the short-term risks of agreement.

With the assistance of the United States, Egypt and Israel implemented an elaborate verification system that enabled them to pursue a limited accommodation even in the face of ongoing mistrust. Initially, the verification system served an important risk reduction function by dampening incentives for surprise attack, thinning out forces near forward areas and clarifying ambiguous activities. In this sense, the detection function of verification was paramount. Once the parties reconciled themselves to the constraints (as well as came to see the benefits) associated with verification, confidence in the system contributed to the gradual building of confidence between the parties.

The Sinai experience indicates that in the early phases of disengagement, the functions of a verification system for the parties may be

quite different from later phases. For example, in the immediate aftermath of hostilities, when confidence is virtually non-existent and there is an urgent need to implement risk management procedures for a new agreement, the verification system may be viewed by the parties mainly as providing early warning. At this critical juncture, (i.e., with an Israeli presence still in the Sinai), the parties are concerned with having sufficient warning time to mount an adequate and immediate military response to counter any threat. In relinquishing strategic depth, Israel required a verification system that would warn of a rapid reinforcement of Egyptian forces in the Sinai which could then surge through the passes. For its part, in the aftermath of the October War, Egypt needed confirmation that Israeli forces would not again be within striking distance of the Egyptian heartland.

Lesson No. 2: Confidence-building perspective:

The confidence-building function of verification is critical where the verification system itself is the centrepiece of a very tenuous relationship with no history of conflict management and where there is a fear that non-compliance will result in the use of force.

In the highly charged atmosphere that characterized the early stages of the Sinai experience, incentives for mutual recrimination and defection were sufficiently significant to require the verification system — both in symbolic and strategic terms — to prove itself operationally effective and thereby provide the parties with initial confidence. In this environment, the collapse of the verification regime due to non-compliance might have resulted in a return to the use of force to resolve fundamental differences. This was especially the case for Egypt and Israel where the breakdown of the regime would have heightened feelings of strategic vulnerability as both sides maintained armed forces dangerously close to each other in the Sinai. Though there were strong political and military incentives on each side to avoid another war, the successful operation of the verification

