

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Confidence building, despite its popularity as a promising security management approach, has a relatively limited and poorly understood track record. It appears to have been employed successfully in the CSCE/OSCE case and other apparent but more modest examples can be discerned in application areas from around the world. There is as yet no compelling account in the professional literature of how confidence building has worked in its principal European application example. Policy makers, by and large, are left to emulate the operational example of the CSCE/OSCE's Vienna Documents with their comprehensive array of CBMs and to draw what lessons they can from the general negotiating history of the CSCE/OSCE process. Although there is a sizeable professional literature, it focuses primarily on the operational characteristics of confidence building. The literature lacks conceptually sophisticated accounts able to provide us with a more general understanding of how confidence building can help to improve difficult security relations. Although there is a consensus understanding of what confidence building is, this conventional or minimalist construction is overly operational focussing too much on CBMs, pays little attention to the process dimension of confidence building, and lacks a convincing explanatory core. The inner workings of the confidence building process remain as much a mystery today as they were ten or twenty years ago.

Access to "more information" and the opportunity to "know each other better" — the mainstays of the minimalist approach to understanding confidence building — are inadequate mechanisms by themselves for explaining how difficult security relations can be improved. Although there may be a common sense plausibility to this view of confidence building, it will not stand up to careful analytic scrutiny. The

minimalist construction simply cannot explain how confidence building, understood as a deliberate and discrete security management approach, is able to improve the security relations of suspicious states.

The transformation view regards the traditional understanding of confidence building as incomplete and focuses on why and how developing confidence building arrangements can help to improve security relations, whether in ways grand or small. Although it does not dismiss the impact on security relations that CBMs can directly have, the transformation view shifts our primary attention away from operational measures and to the processes associated with their development and application. It sees the power of confidence building residing in the broader processes of creation and implementation rather than exclusively in the operational product of confidence building (i.e., an agreement comprised of CBMs).

While the transformation view sees confidence building as being potentially more powerful than do more traditional accounts, it also sees more limitations constraining the successful application of the confidence building approach, particularly with respect to the importance of supporting conditions. In their absence, the opportunities for successful confidence building will be reduced significantly.

The Transformation View

Confidence building, according to the transformation view, is a distinctive activity undertaken by policy makers with the minimum, explicit intention of improving at least some aspects of a suspicious and traditionally antagonistic security relationship through security policy coordination and cooperation. It entails the comprehensive process of exploring, negotiating, and then implementing measures that promote interaction, information exchange, and constraint. It also