

## Chapter Four

### The Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Negotiations

The Negotiations on the Mutual Reduction of Forces and Armaments and Associated Measures in Central Europe<sup>12</sup> can be considered a Confidence-Building Process despite the fact that no actual agreement has yet been negotiated.<sup>13</sup> The lengthy and tortuous negotiations have revealed much about *the basic perceptions and approaches of the two basic negotiating groups* as they have sought (sometimes, perhaps, not very seriously) an agreeable formula to permit a reduction in conventional forces and a lessening of tensions within the Central European theatre. This is very much in the spirit of confidence building. As well, one part of this process has involved the development of some specific CBMs called Associated Measures. Some of these Associated Measures are re-worked Helsinki CBMs while others are very similar to more demanding second-generation CSBM proposals. Finally, it is worth recalling that the idea for MBFR negotiations was advanced by NATO as a "counter" or offset to the persistent Warsaw Treaty Organization-sponsored CSCE proposal. Since that time, the two negotiating processes have had parallel but distinct existences which, in general terms, have reflected the difference in basic arms-control approach between West and East, a difference that extends to the construction and negotiation of Confidence-Building Measures. The tendency is for the West (especially the Americans) to prefer non-political, technically-oriented arms-control negotiations while the East (the Soviet Union) has generally preferred "political" negotiations where broad matters of great power relations can be addressed. True to this basic form, the CSCE was an inherently political undertaking while the MBFR Negotiations have been much more narrowly technical. As we saw in Chapter Three, the Helsinki Final Act of the CSCE produced very modest volun-

tary and non-intrusive Confidence-Building Measures. The MBFR negotiations have foundered on more intrusive CBMs and the inability to generate a common data base. The respective fates of the two sets of negotiations may be an instructive warning for those considering CSBM proposals in the future.

#### MBFR – A Short History

The origins of the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction negotiations can be traced to the "Harmel Report" of 1967. This NATO report, the product of a study group examining future Alliance tasks, concluded that a political accommodation with the East was crucial and that part of that accommodation would have to involve conventional force reductions. The findings of the report were influenced by the growing desire of many NATO members to reduce their conventional force strengths and defence budget expenditures. This was particularly true in the United States where anti-Vietnam War sentiments were growing and where increasing Congressional resistance to funding U.S. troops in Europe was a serious domestic political reality. Also important was the growing European interest in fostering detente. The Harmel Report received NATO Ministerial approval in December 1967 and led directly to the NATO Ministerial Declaration on MBFR in June 1968 (the so-called Reykjavik Signal). The Ministerial Declaration spoke of the need for a balance of forces in Central Europe and declared that "it was desirable that a process leading to mutual force reductions should be initiated."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is the official term for the negotiations. In the West, they are commonly identified by the acronym MBFR – Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions. In the East, the term "balanced" is never used and the negotiations are called "Reduction of Armed Forces and Armaments in Central Europe."

<sup>13</sup> The distinction between a Confidence-Building Measure and Process will be explored in Chapter Five. It is largely self-evident, hinging on the difference between a final product – a binding or non-binding codified measure – and an ongoing process considered apart from any final outcome.

<sup>14</sup> Useful discussions of the MBFR negotiations include: Jonathan Dean, "MBFR: From Apathy to Accord," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 4; John G. Keliher, *The Negotiations on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions* (New York: Pergamon Press); Jeffrey Record, *Force Reductions in Europe: Starting Over* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, Inc., 1980); and Lothar Ruehl, *MBFR: Lessons and Problems* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1982).

