

Chapter Seven

An Assessment of Confidence Building in Theory and Practice

The basic approach adopted in this study has been to examine the Confidence-Building idea from a number of distinct perspectives, attempting to develop a comprehensive understanding of the CBM concept. These efforts together have yielded a relatively extensive conception of Confidence-Building. In the process of exploring existing conceptions, descriptions and definitions of CBMs, we have noted some conceptual problems and, in the process, we have constructed our own (we hope superior) composite definition along with a basic set of CBM categories. We have also looked at a great many specific CBM proposals, noting their individual strengths and weaknesses. Yet to be explored, however, are the larger-scale or generic problems that characterize the Confidence-Building literature and its treatment of the Confidence-Building concept. This is the last major perspective that we will employ in our effort to produce a useful introductory understanding of Confidence-Building Measures.⁶¹

The Generic Flaws of the CBM Literature

With relatively few exceptions, the Confidence-Building literature is oriented toward the discussion of existing CBMs and CBM negotiation fora (Helsinki and its follow-ons) as well as the assessment or advocacy of various new CBM proposals. Not surprisingly, perhaps, much of this literature is "atheoretical", employing no recognizable theoretical perspective to explicitly address and explore the *dynamics* of the Confidence-Building process and seldom incorporating any but the most anecdotal insights from contemporary political science and psychology. While there are some exceptions, the majority of the Confidence-Building literature relies upon poorly developed or

implicit assumptions about the nature and operation of "Confidence-Building." This atheoretical bias is typified by the literature's overwhelming tendency to focus narrowly on pragmatic policy concerns related specifically to the Central European conventional military balance. *In a very real sense, most Confidence-Building thinking – whether by academic analysts, policy advisors or policy makers – is the captive of these substantive considerations rather than any specific conception of how Confidence-Building works.*⁶²

Viewed from a deliberately critical perspective, the Confidence-Building literature as a whole, its specific CBM proposals and the derivative concept of Confidence-Building exhibit collectively a number of serious generic problems. Although there are partial exceptions to these observations, the Western CBM literature and the more general habits of thought that produce it are surprisingly consistent in exhibiting these generic flaws. The most significant of them appear to be:

1. an indifference to – or an unwillingness to address – the complex, idiosyncratic and apparently very offensive substance of Soviet defence policy, military doctrine, and conventional military capabilities;
2. a frequent failure to understand or appreciate what the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Treaty Organization allies consider to be genuine military threats and "legitimate" concerns;⁶³
3. a frequent failure to perform, rely upon, include or even refer to detailed critical analyses of the actual character of the NATO-WTO military balance, its dynamics and the sorts of threats that each side poses – actually as well as potentially – for the other and for third parties;

⁶¹ There is no author by author critique developed in this study. A detailed "proof" that the literature (and most CBM thinking) actually exhibits the generic flaws noted here would require a study considerably more extensive than this one and might still be regarded as an argument by selective example. As a practical matter, it is extremely difficult to demonstrate conclusively that an extensive and diverse body of literature commits certain errors of omission or makes certain implicit assumptions. Chapters Five and Six provide suggestive grounds for these claims but only a very detailed examination of the literature itself will substantiate the case outlined in this study.

⁶² This is true of most Confidence-Building literature, whether produced by analysts from the West, the neutral and non-aligned or East European states. A partial exception can be found in some East European work which has a broader, conspicuously non-technical declaratory focus with an ideological tone and purpose. Even it could be said to have a clear policy-oriented character, albeit one expressed in very different language. Much (non-Russian) East European work, however, exhibits the same atheoretical, narrow, substantive focus typical of the Western work.

