necessarily improve security relations. Indeed, relations may worsen as added information feeds existing misperceptions and fears.

This idea of a major change in perceptions of threat is important because it alerts us to the likelihood that CBMs may work best when some variety of positive shift in security thinking is already taking place. According to this view, the negotiation and implementation of a package of confidence building measures will *accelerate or facilitate that process of improvement.* It seems less likely that a confidence building arrangement can actually start such a process by itself although this also may be possible, particularly in regions with different security relationships and political cultures.

Thus, the timing of negotiations to develop CBMs may be critical to their success. Pursue them too soon and they will produce a disappointingly marginal — or even dangerous — result. Wait too long and the pursuit of a CBM package will miss the window during which it can have a positive impact on the evolution of security relations. We do not yet completely understand the exact role played by the negotiation and implementation of confidence building agreements in this larger process of change. Thus, we remain uncertain about their precise status as *agent* (cause) or *artifact* (parallel phenomenon) of change. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the negotiation of confidence building agreements can play an important — perhaps crucial — part in the positive transformation of security relations. This makes their pursuit worthwhile and important.

Without attempting to make confidence building sound more complex or less promising than it is, we should nevertheless be clear that confidence building is an imperfectly understood security management approach. Obviously, its successful use in existing or new areas of application will depend on a good understanding of what confidence building really is and how it works. Thus far, we have good reasons for thinking that the approach has yielded successful outcomes in the European case. Although we aren't entirely sure we understand completely how confidence building has worked in this case, we have an increasingly good sense of its basic nature. The perspectives that follow summarize this knowledge and should provide some guidance to those wishing to develop the approach in new areas of application.

Three Perspectives

There are several different ways of presenting what we now know about confidence building. Each looks at a unique aspect of confidence building. Together, they provide a usefully comprehensive understanding. These perspectives include:

- A general or abstract definition of confidence building as a process;