

of the literature completely obscured a more important but less obvious point about the nature of the confidence building process. This warrants a brief discussion because it helps to explain the origin and nature of some thinking underlying the transformation view.

It certainly is true that most confidence building studies during this period failed to be explicit and thorough in discussing the nature of the Soviet military threat and the risks associated with negotiating and adopting CBMs, given that apparent threat.¹⁴ Most treatments appeared to down-play this concern, the significance of which is easily obscured by the passage of time and the dramatic positive changes in European security relations since then. Nevertheless, there clearly was a tendency to minimize or simply ignore the significance of the Soviet conventional military threat in confidence building treatments.

Without dismissing the relevance of this serious analytic shortcoming, it may be more instructive from our contemporary perspective to ask:

- (1) Why did confidence building advocates (both policy makers and analysts) apparently believe that the Soviet Union did *not* represent the sort of threat that other, more sceptical analysts and policy makers perceived? and
- (2) Why did these advocates believe, apparently with some conviction, that developing and implementing CBMs would improve (presumably significantly) the security relationship in Europe and do so at relatively little risk?

It has taken a number of years to recognize the true (versus apparent) significance of this first "generic flaw" in the literature and to understand that it is tied to the second, theoretically-oriented analytic flaw. It now appears that many confidence building analysts (mostly but not exclusively Western) *actually may themselves have been*

participants in a substantial precursor confidence building process as they developed, wrote about, discussed, and promoted the confidence building approach as part of a developing community of experts.

It is a special and regrettable irony that these analysts have not asked if and how their thinking about the "Soviet threat" was transformed as they developed confidence building ideas.¹⁵ Significantly, this suggests the possibility that participants may not be fully aware of the process of transformation as it changes their ideas about the nature of threat posed by historically dangerous neighbours. A more provocative possibility suggests that participants *cannot* be fully aware of these types of changes on a personal level due to the internal, inaccessible nature of the changes. This obviously will make discovering and documenting the operation of the transformation process particularly difficult. Perhaps if the conceptual dimension of confidence building — particularly the need to focus on causal questions about what made confidence building work — had been better grasped and more seriously developed at the time, this aspect of the phenomenon might have received more attention in the literature.

Causal Weakness

The second generic flaw — effectively, causal imprecision — remains problematic as far as most of the literature is concerned. In the words of the original study:

"[T]here is a widespread and pronounced failure to either provide or refer to a satisfactory or even plausible model of the Confidence-Building process. Most of the Confidence-Building literature makes some sort of reference to the ways in which 'confidence' can be created or fostered...but there is seldom any serious discussion of the dynamic psychological process or processes that would presumably 'make' Confidence-Building 'work'".¹⁶