CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY CONFIDENCE BUILDING THINKING: CONTINUING CONCEPTUAL WEAKNESS

The professional confidence building literature and the policy thinking closely associated with it generally continue to treat confidence building in much the same manner that they did more than a decade ago. This chapter focuses briefly on the continuing conceptual weakness of traditional confidence building thinking. In particular, the chapter discusses the essential features and limitations of the "minimalist" or conventional view that is still typical of the professional literature and policy thinking. In the process, it reiterates some concerns first noted in *Confidence (and Security) Building Measures in the Arms Control Process: A Canadian Perspective* twelve years ago. The chapter also introduces the notion of *reconstruction*, an approach to reinterpreting a policy-oriented activity that has developed a broader meaning than originally appreciated. Reconstruction has particular relevance in the case of confidence building where post-1986 events have given us a fuller appreciation of what confidence building may entail and be able to achieve.

The main point made in this chapter is that traditional post-1984 accounts, with their measure-centric emphasis and primary concentration on enhancing transparency, continue to do a poor job of explaining why security relations can improve as a result of "using CBMs," often failing to even address the issue explicitly. This is puzzling given the important confidence building accomplishments in the CSCE/OSCE since 1986. Indeed, this failure to incorporate insights drawn from the on-going CSCE/OSCE experience should be considered a major limitation in contemporary confidence building thinking.

Background

The confidence building literature, from its inception, has had a distinctly operational and pragmatic character. That certainly was the case up to 1984 when *Confidence (and Security) Building Measures in the Arms Control Process: A Canadian Perspective* was written, a point emphasized in the previous chapter. The main preoccupation of the literature to that date seems to have been with developing practical solutions for a variety of real-world security problems based on the use of confidence building *measures*. Typically, these problems were surprise attack-related and viewed in the context of the Central European, NATO-WTO, armour-oriented, conventional military relationship. Although some analysts also examined confidence building in the maritime or strategic nuclear context or in other application areas such as the Middle East or Latin America, these were distinctly secondary efforts and were often informed by the CSCE/OSCE model. Probably as a result of this operational focus, most analysts displayed little interest in developing explicitly conceptual explorations of the subject, generally seeming to regard them as unnecessary given what they saw as the relatively straightforward and modest nature of confidence building.

While there is little doubt that the pre-1984 literature disdained detailed conceptual treatments with explicit causal models, some might argue, that this is neither surprising nor a problem. Confidence building, according to this view, is every bit as straightforward and limited a phenomenon as those earlier treatments implied. Confidence building involves nothing more than efforts to formalize arrangements enhancing access to information,