

are guilty of this type of thinking. They are insensitive to a host of confounding uncertainties, ranging from the vagaries of leadership dynamics and personality to the cultural-historical, institutional and organizational imponderables of all modern societies. They also ignore the realities of modern military technology. The mere fact, for instance, that both sides possess such ambiguous capabilities and doctrines that it is impossible to objectively identify them as being purely (or even largely) offensive or defensive will frustrate efforts to dispel uncertainty about intentions. Nevertheless, a large fraction of Confidence-Building thinking is prone to sponsoring the reduction of uncertainty through the pursuit of "transparency". This simply may not be possible and could even be counterproductive.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to these psychologically-oriented problems associated directly with explaining how Confidence-Building Measures work, there is virtually no consideration of the complex processes that animate the whole problem of misperception, suspicion, faulty inferences and, more generally, the inability to see and understand complex phenomena in an objective manner. Most CBM analyses begin with the proposition that the misperception and the mistrust and the lack of confidence already exist and that "something" ought to be done about it. The origins and the mechanisms of misperception and the broader array of cognitive processes that structure the basic problems in the first place are frequently ignored. If Confidence-Building Measures to counter these mechanisms and processes are to be constructed and negotiated successfully, must not the mechanisms and processes themselves be understood first?

These two types of fundamental error summarize the basic nature of the larger collection of generic flaws listed earlier, the faulty (usually implicit) assumptions that undermine both the logic and the substance of the Confidence-Building literature and, more generally, a great deal of Confidence-Building thinking.

<sup>66</sup> The clearest illustration of the positive role of uncertainty in military relations is to be found in the Soviet-American strategic deterrence relationship. There, uncertainty about intentions and capabilities is thought to be crucial to the operation of successful deterrence. Any erosion of that constructive uncertainty would be counterproductive, even dangerous.

As was stated earlier, it is simply not feasible in this report to explore in detail either the full impact of these generic types of flaws or the methods and ideas currently under development to "correct" that impact. Such an undertaking would require a separate study. However, a suggestive outline of the new methods and new research can be developed in order to give some substance to these complaints about "generic flaws" and, more important, to suggest how contemporary Confidence-Building Measures and Confidence-Building thinking can be improved.

### The Problem of Oversimplification

Before moving on to discuss these two fundamental types of generic error in greater detail, an important point needs to be made about their relationship with a more important, larger-scale and even more general problem that undermines honest efforts to understand virtually all defence issues. The problem has to do with *analytic oversimplification*. It is actually a more general version of the Type One CBM generic flaw. *The problem is the incapacity of both policy analysts and policy makers to comprehend the full dimensions of and deal effectively with extremely complex international politico-military phenomena.* Because they have such great trouble recognizing, assimilating and analyzing the full texture of complex policy problems and, as a consequence, devising appropriate policy solutions, *people tend to impose their own imperfect version of order, simplicity and certainty on those problems in order to render them understandable and solvable.*<sup>67</sup> This apparently fundamental incapacity to accommodate uncertainty and complexity is sometimes acknowledged in passing, particu-

<sup>67</sup> It is worth noting that policy makers are, in some ways, better able than academics to deal with complexity and uncertainty, at least on a pragmatic level. Their standard response is to adopt incremental policy choices and to sequentially address distinct sub-problem components of the overall policy problem. This is why policy responses to difficult, complex and novel policy problems often (a) seem to be based upon inconsistent or unrelated components, (b) sport weak rationales and (c) contain fairly conservative adjustments of existing policies. Analysts are more subtle in their distortions as they seek to "make" information fit into an existing conceptual, global view of a given reality. This sort of forced congruence can be very damaging, however, because it leads to the belief that analysts understand complex realities when, in fact, they only reconstruct biased portions of those realities.

