

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is a comparative assessment of the various attempts at confidence-building in the Asia Pacific region, encompassing both bilateral and multilateral measures. A specific aim of the paper is to ascertain whether bilateral CBMs such as those contained in the Shanghai and Sino-Indian agreements can be applied to a multilateral setting, such as the ARF. It should be noted that negotiating CBMs is primarily a political exercise requiring strong political will on the part of regional states. Participants must be convinced that the benefits of CBMs outweigh the costs and risks to national security.

Early CBMs Proposals:

The early proposals on confidence-building in the Asia Pacific region made by non-Asian states were largely, but not exclusively, inspired by the CSCE experience. Many of these proposals were in the nature of "trial balloons", but regional countries were skeptical of them on the ground that there remained important differences in the security situation between Europe and Asia and that CBMs that are appropriate for Europe may not be relevant to Asia.

Track-II CBMs:

Track-II dialogues on CBMs helped regional governments to overcome the initial reluctance to engage in the confidence-building process. Apart from generating new ideas suitable for the Asia Pacific region, these dialogues have also served as "filtering mechanisms" for approaches to regional security cooperation developed in other parts of the world as well as in various global fora.

The ARF:

Cautious incrementalism, rather than a broad-brush initiative, appears to be the hallmark of the ARF's approach to CBMs. Until now the ARF has emphasized the process rather than the product. It has avoided considering constraining measures of any kind, choosing instead to focus on principles and transparency measures, particularly information and communication CBMs. The list of possible CBMs contained in the ARF Concept Paper of 1995 is by no means exhaustive. The Concept Paper's attempt to draw a distinction between CBMs, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution is somewhat arbitrary. There is bound to be considerable overlap between CBMs and measures that fall under the other two categories.

The South China Sea Workshops:

The South China Workshops organized by Indonesia and funded by Canada have proposed a number of specific CBMs, including: (1) non-expansion of military presence in the disputed areas, and (2) exchange of visits by military commanders in the disputed areas.