

Further Application and Development: Problems and Prospects

Without doubt, great hopes are attached to the possibilities of confidence building in many parts of the world, particularly in light of the apparent success enjoyed in CSCE/OSCE during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The prospects for developing effective confidence building arrangements in new application areas, perhaps patterned broadly on the European model, are promising. If the same or similar sorts of positive change can be fostered and institutionalized in other application areas, the confidence building approach will prove to be both powerful and general.

However, this potential cannot be realized unless a policy-relevant and conceptually sound understanding of the confidence building process and how it works animates these efforts. Relying on the existing literature's minimalist conception of confidence building with its tendency to reify the operational content of confidence building measures as the essence of "confidence building" is unlikely to prove an adequate guide to action. This traditional view tends to recommend simply assembling standard CBMs. However, it does not speak to the conditions that should be in place for effective confidence building to occur and lacks a convincing account of why adopting these measures will improve security relations.

Efforts to "reinvent the wheel" in new application areas — to develop "confidence building" ideas and approaches more-or-less from scratch — are also unlikely to prove particularly helpful. Such efforts tend to ignore the implicit influence of existing (typically minimalist) conceptions and risk building into new accounts the same problems that plague existing ones. This tendency also slights the store of valuable insights available in the existing literature, including discussions of issues such as that presented in this review. Relying on open-ended understandings where confidence building can mean virtually anything will also prove to be unhelpful in developing effective policy. This approach loses all contact with any

underlying conceptual ideas about why and how confidence building can improve security relations.

Although a certain degree of caution guarding against the thoughtless adoption of potentially idiosyncratic Western security management ideas is both understandable and appropriate, analysts and policy makers in other regions should be careful to avoid dismissing useful policy ideas that have a sound conceptual foundation. Without a solid, causally-aware understanding of the confidence building process and how it can change security relations, we will have little idea of how to transfer and modify the generalized experience of Europe to other parts of the world and to other types of security relationships. And the European experience *is* the primary case that we have to inform our understanding of the phenomenon, so it should not be ignored. This is a very important point, particularly as other regions approach the threshold of significant security breakthroughs of their own.

To the extent that other examples of successful confidence building do emerge, they should also be examined very carefully so that we can amend our existing (CSCE/OSCE-oriented) understanding of how confidence building works. The recent apparent success of Russian and Chinese negotiators in developing a comprehensive confidence building regime for their border region is a good example of such a case.² If the lessons of this and other potentially important cases are not analyzed in a thorough fashion, their analytic and policy-prescriptive value will be diminished significantly.

The tendency for policy makers and analysts to use "confidence building" in unorthodox ways or to slight the need to associate "confidence building" with a conceptual foundation that can explain how and under what circumstances it can work is a special problem that deserves further comment. Policy makers, in particular, are prone to resist too-formal and rigid an approach to confidence building, preferring to employ a very flexible understanding that focuses on common sense propositions about the virtues of enhanced