

Any arms control agreement, or confidence-building agreement, such as was recently negotiated at the Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, essentially represents a compromise between contracting parties. Each side bases at least part of its national security on the promises of the other side, that all parties will live up to their obligations, rather than entirely on the strength of its own weaponry. Since the benefit to each signatory is derived from the compliance of the other with the terms of the agreement, there is a natural desire for some form of external assurance that all participants are fulfilling their obligations.

Simply put, then, verification is the means by which assurance is gained. Consequently, the reliability and adequacy of the verification provisions included in an arms control agreement is usually of vital importance to the successful negotiation of the agreement and the successful operation of the agreement once it enters into force. At the same time, by confirming that activities prohibited by agreements are not taking place and that parties are fulfilling their obligations, verification can help to generate a climate of international confidence that is indispensable for progress in arms control.