

There are two claims residing in this interpretation that are important to the thinking underlying this review. They should be identified explicitly. The claims are that:

- (1) there indeed has been a meaningful transformation in the security relations of most OSCE states, and
- (2) “confidence building” — understood as a process — has played an important role in that transformation.

It is *not* claimed here that the development, negotiation, and implementation of confidence building agreements was the sole cause of this profound change in security relations, only that confidence building appears to have played an important role, at minimum helping to institutionalize some of the changes. The simple fact that comprehensive confidence building agreements and a significant force reduction treaty (the Conventional Forces in Europe or CFE Treaty) have been negotiated and enjoy substantial continuing support is ample evidence that changed security relations have been institutionalized.

The prospects for developing effective confidence building arrangements in new application areas, either informed by or patterned broadly on the European model and its generalized lessons, therefore seem promising and are a direct function of this earlier success. If the same or similar sorts of positive change can be fostered in other application areas, the confidence building approach will prove to be both powerful and general.

However, confidence building is an imperfectly understood security management approach, even in the CSCE/OSCE case. This makes its real promise more uncertain than is usually appreciated. To use the approach effectively in new contexts, therefore, we must understand how it works and what it entails. Importantly, this understanding must be rendered in terms as generalized as possible and must be based on an appropriately rigorous conceptual foundation. The professional literature

exploring confidence building has not been as useful in this regard as one might hope, tending to be both operational in orientation and atheoretical.

Background

Confidence Building in the Arms Control Process: A Transformation View explores a variety of conceptual and practical issues associated with confidence building in an attempt to better understand both its nature and its potential. The aim is to move past current, overly-simplified appreciations of confidence building — appreciations that are in fact quite dated — and to explain this potentially powerful security management approach in terms that highlight its under-appreciated capacity to help transform difficult security relationships under specified circumstances.

The views presented in this review are by no means widely held. Most who are familiar with confidence building see it in much simpler terms rooted in early 1980s-era thinking. Thus, there is still a strong tendency in both policy and analytic circles to employ what can be termed a “minimalist construction” of confidence building. This understanding typically lacks a clear causal sense of how the confidence building process functions: That is, how and why developing, negotiating, and implementing a confidence building agreement can significantly improve a security relationship characterized by suspicion, misperceptions, and presumptions of hostility.

In the minimalist construction, “confidence building” is assigned little sense of real process and is treated for all intents and purposes as a synonym for the *use* of confidence building measures (CBMs) or, even less helpfully, as a synonym for the CBMs themselves. And using these measures is associated with a general but unexplored expectation that the adoption and use of CBMs more-or-less automatically will reduce suspicion and misperception, thus improving a security relationship. This is presumed to occur because participating states will have more (and