

## ***Road to Reconciliation: Confidence Building Measures***

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### **Introduction**

Throughout history, states have been on the brink of full-scale warfare but fell short because they found a way to navigate out of the imbroglio. Diplomatic tools were employed to build trust among hostile states and eliminate concerns over adversarial intent. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are one such apparatus that entail actions that reflect goodwill between conflicting parties, in hopes of a sanguine outcome. CBMs aims to decrease tension, anxiety, and chances of conflict between adversaries as a form of preventative diplomacy. The Henry L. Stimson Centre in Washington D.C. noted *‘four primary’* tools to facilitate CBMs: communication, constraint, transparency and verification. Communication helps defuse animosity in moments of crisis. Primarily employed as ‘hotlines’, these consultative mechanisms allow states to air hostilities before taking any major action. Constraint measures, such as limited force deployment zones, keep specific types, levels and numbers of military forces away from conflicting parties, especially along borders. Transparency measures engage states in fostering trust through openness about their military activities and capabilities. Verification measures are employed to collect data and signify if a state is compliant with a particular agreement while simultaneously attributing to transparency. This commentary will provide an insight into the role of CBMs in two key conflict situations, the Cold War and Bangladesh’s War of Liberation, and explore what exact mechanisms were employed that led to lasting peace among the states.

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## **The Pre-Conditions of CBMs**

Historically, CBMs have prevented catastrophe from states in mutual disdain in a plethora of ways. However, many analysts have argued that a suitable environment is required for successful and effective confidence-building. The notion of confidence itself assumes that states in conflict also share a room for limited cooperation<sup>2</sup>. Before we dive into the list of pre-conditions, it is important to note that CBMs are not linear across all regions or states. Since, CBMs themselves contrast, the pre-conditions will also follow suit. The first minimal condition for confidence-building is a common interest and shared understanding that cooperative interaction is necessary to alleviate hostilities. Next is the common acceptance that the current state of mistrust and suspicions is detrimental to both interacting parties and should not be acceptable.

Furthermore, there needs to be a willingness to engage in diplomacy and negotiations – some form of direct contact with one another. There also needs to be strong leaders with an unwavering spirit to enter these said negotiations. Combined with favourable objective conditions (such as technological capabilities), these factors will provide suitable conditions to undertake confidence-building.

## **Evolution of CBMS**

### ***First Generation CBMs***

The Helinski Final Act in 1975 gave birth to the first generation of CBMs. Their main purpose was to at increase trust thus reducing the clandestine manner in which military matters were traditionally conducted (particularly in Eastern Europe), and improving the prediction of military activities overall<sup>3</sup>. However, one major theoretical critic of these measures was that although the

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<sup>2</sup> Fisher, C., 2021 | [The Preconditions of Confidence-Building: Lessons from the European Experience](#) | Stimson Center| p.266.

<sup>3</sup> Richard, Darilek., 2021 | [East-West Confidence Building: Defusing the Cold War in Europe](#) / Stimson Center| p.247.

CBMs would diminish hostilities, they may also promote false confidence between interacting states.

### *Second Generation of CBMs*

A new generation of CBMs came about during the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets in 1979 and Soviet threats to Poland in the 1980s. The Soviets' misuse of these measures to strong-arm Poland through political intimidation in 1981 raised a number of eyebrows. Widescale military units and exercises were deployed near the Polish border in an attempt to coerce rebellious Poles who then threatened to overthrow their pro-Soviet government<sup>4</sup>. In this rapidly developing hostile environment, two landmarks came way which established a new generation of CBMs.

The second effort that grew and developed in the heightened Cold War environment of the early 1980s was the attempt to negotiate a new and improved set of CBMs for conventional forces in Europe. This effort reached fruition in the Stockholm Document on Confidence and Security Building Measures of 1986. The addition of "security" to the title of CBMs in that document, thereby making them confidence and security building measures (CSBMs), signified more ambitious objectives for such measures.

### *Third Generation CSBMs*

As East–West relations began to make progress where none had been thought possible, a new generation of CSBMs were developed by the United States and its European allies. These measures promised to set limits, or "constraints," on conventional military forces that were much tighter and more direct than any previously negotiated. Instead of trying to limit military exercises indirectly, as the Stockholm document did with calendar notification requirements of up to two years in advance, advocates of tougher constraint measures called for the outright prohibition of the specified activities.

In the late 1980s, détente had returned and the outlook for arms control negotiations had never been brighter. Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev's speech to the United Nations in December 1988 clearly placed conventional arms control high on the list of East–West priorities and helped

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<sup>4</sup> John Borawski | From the Atlantic to the Urals | 29, p. 58–59.

to assuage fears in the West of the Soviet threat. This effect was compounded when the Kremlin allowed the fundamental political changes sweeping through Central and Eastern Europe to run their course.

The 1990 Vienna CSBM talks focused, for the most part, on fleshing out agenda items originally introduced, but not agreed to, in Stockholm. To this end, during the course of several years of negotiations, participants in the 1990 talks achieved the following: Produced a sweeping information exchange provision, which rivals the CFE treaty's requirements for data; Supplemented Stockholm's on-site inspection regime by providing for the on-site presence of personnel from other states to evaluate information exchanged about military forces; Set up direct communication links among participants via a multilateral computer network for rapid exchange of data and notifications; Encouraged contacts among military forces by providing for periodic visits to air bases and promoting military personnel exchanges; Established an obligation for consultation and cooperation regarding "unusual and unscheduled" military activities, without defining specific thresholds for such activities; and Created a mechanism for implementing this obligation, a Conflict Prevention Center in Vienna, serving all CSCE participants.

